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SPRING SOWING

by

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Short Story Index Reprint Series

BOOKS FOR LIBRARIES PRESS
FREEPORT, NEW YORK

465069

First Published 1924
Reprinted 1973

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

O'Flaherty, Liam, 1897-
Spring sowing.

(Short story index reprint series)
I. Title.
PZ3.033Sp5 (PR6029.F5) 823'.9'12 72-10748
ISBN 0-8369-4221-3

Harriet Irving Library
FEB 5 1975
University of New Brunswick

WITHDRAWN

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

to

MARGARET BARRINGTON

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I

Spring Sowing

IT WAS STILL DARK WHEN MARTIN DELANEY AND his wife Mary got up. Martin stood in his shirt by the window a long time looking out, rubbing his eyes and yawning, while Mary raked out the live coals that had lain hidden in the ashes on the hearth all night. Outside, cocks were crowing and a white streak was rising from the ground, as it were, and beginning to scatter the darkness. It was a February morning, dry, cold and starry.

The couple sat down to their breakfast of tea, bread and butter, in silence. They had only been married the previous autumn and it was hateful leaving a warm bed at such an early hour. They both felt in a bad humour and ate, wrapped in their thoughts. Martin with his brown hair and eyes, his freckled face and his little fair moustache, looked too young to be married, and his wife looked hardly more than a girl, red-cheeked and blue-eyed, her black hair piled at the rear of her head with a large comb gleaming in the middle of the pile, Spanish fashion. They were both dressed in rough homespuns, and both wore the loose white frieze shirt that Inverara peasants use for work in the fields.

They ate in silence, sleepy and bad humoured and

yet on fire with excitement, for it was the first day of their first spring sowing as man and wife. And each felt the glamour of that day on which they were to open up the earth together and plant seeds in it. So they sat in silence and bad humour, for somehow the imminence of an event that had been long expected, loved, feared and prepared for, made them dejected. Mary, with her shrewd woman's mind, munched her bread and butter and thought of . . . Oh, what didn't she think of? Of as many things as there are in life does a woman think in the first joy and anxiety of her mating. But Martin's mind was fixed on one thought. Would he be able to prove himself a man worthy of being the head of a family by doing his spring sowing well?

In the barn after breakfast, when they were getting the potato seeds and the line for measuring the ground and the spade, a cross word or two passed between them, and when Martin fell over a basket in the half-darkness of the barn, he swore and said that a man would be better off dead than . . . But before he could finish whatever he was going to say, Mary had her arms around his waist and her face to his. "Martin," she said, "let us not begin this day cross with one another." And there was a tremor in her voice. And somehow, as they embraced and Martin kept mumbling in his awkward peasant's voice,

"pulse of my heart, treasure of my life," and such traditional phrases, all their irritation and sleepiness left them. And they stood there embracing until at last Martin pushed her from him with pretended roughness and said: "Come, come, girl, it will be sunset before we begin at this rate."

Still, as they walked silently in their raw-hide shoes, through the little hamlet, there was not a soul about. Lights were glimmering in the windows of a few cabins. The sky had a big grey crack in it in the east, as if it were going to burst in order to give birth to the sun. Birds were singing somewhere at a distance. Martin and Mary rested their baskets of seeds on a fence outside the village and Martin whispered to Mary proudly: "We are first, Mary." And they both looked back at the little cluster of cabins, that was the centre of their world, with throbbing hearts. For the joy of spring had now taken complete hold of them.

They reached the little field where they were to sow. It was a little triangular patch of ground under an ivy-covered limestone hill. The little field had been manured with seaweed some weeks before, and the weeds had rotted and whitened on the grass. And there was a big red heap of fresh seaweed lying in a corner by the fence to be spread under the seeds as they were laid. Martin, in spite of the cold, threw

off everything above his waist except his striped woollen shirt. Then he spat on his hands, seized his spade and cried: "Now you are going to see what kind of a man you have, Mary."

"There now," said Mary, tying a little shawl closer under her chin. "Aren't we boastful this early hour of the morning? Maybe I'll wait till sunset to see what kind of a man have I got."

The work began. Martin measured the ground by the southern fence for the first ridge, a strip of ground four feet wide, and he placed the line along the edge and pegged it at each end. Then he spread fresh seaweed over the strip. Mary filled her apron with seeds and began to lay them in rows, four, three, four. When she was a little distance down the ridge Martin advanced with his spade to the head eager to commence.

"Now in the name of God," he cried, spitting on his palms, "let us raise the first sod!"

"Oh, Martin, wait till I'm with you!" cried Mary, dropping her seeds on the ridge and running up to him. Her fingers outside her woollen mittens were numb with the cold, and she couldn't wipe them in her apron. Her cheeks seemed to be on fire. She put an arm round Martin's waist and stood looking at the green sod his spade was going to cut, with the excitement of a little child.

"Now for God's sake, girl, keep back!" said Martin gruffly. "Suppose anybody saw us trapesing about like this in the field of our spring sowing, what would they take us for but a pair of useless, soft, empty-headed people that would be sure to die of the hunger. Huh!" He spoke very rapidly, and his eyes were fixed on the ground before him. His eyes had a wild, eager light in them as if some primeval impulse were burning within his brain and driving out every other desire but that of asserting his manhood and of subjugating the earth.

"Oh, what do we care who is looking?" said Mary; but she drew back at the same time and gazed distantly at the ground. Then Martin cut the sod, and pressing the spade deep into the earth with his foot, he turned up the first sod with a crunching sound as the grass roots were dragged out of the earth. Mary sighed and walked back hurriedly to her seeds with furrowed brows. She picked up her seeds and began to spread them rapidly to drive out the sudden terror that had seized her at that moment when the first sod was turned up and she saw the fierce, hard look in her husband's eyes, that were unconscious of her presence. She became suddenly afraid of that pitiless, cruel earth, the peasant's slave master, that would keep her chained to hard work and poverty all her life until she would sink again into its bosom.

Her short-lived love was gone. Henceforth she was only her husband's helper to till the earth. And Martin, absolutely without thought, worked furiously, covering the ridge with black earth, his sharp spade gleaming white as he whirled it sideways to beat the sods.

Then as the sun rose the little valley beneath the ivy-covered hills became dotted with white frieze shirts, and everywhere men worked madly without speaking and women spread seeds. There was no heat in the light of the sun, and there was a sharpness in the still thin air that made the men jump on their spade hafts ferociously and beat the sods as if they were living enemies. Birds hopped silently before the spades, with their heads cocked sideways, watching for worms. Made brave by hunger they often dashed under the spades to secure their food.

Then when the sun reached a certain point all the women went back to the village to get dinner for their men, and the men worked on without stopping. Then the women returned, almost running, each carrying a tin can with a flannel tied around it and a little bundle tied with a white cloth. Martin threw down his spade when Mary arrived back in the field. Smiling at one another they sat under the hill for their meal. It was the same as their breakfast, tea and bread and butter.

"Ah," said Martin, when he had taken a long draught of tea from his mug, "is there anything in this world as fine as eating dinner out in the open like this after doing a good morning's work? There, I have done two ridges and a half. That's more than any man in the village could do. Ha!" And he looked at his wife proudly.

"Yes, isn't it lovely," said Mary, looking at the black ridges wistfully. She was just munching her bread and butter. The hurried trip to the village and the trouble of getting the tea ready had robbed her of her appetite. She had to keep blowing at the turf fire with the rim of her skirt, and the smoke nearly blinded her. But now sitting on that grassy knoll, with the valley all round glistening with fresh seaweed and a light smoke rising from the freshly turned earth, a strange joy swept over her. It overpowered that other feeling of dread that had been with her during the morning.

Martin ate heartily, revelling in his great thirst and his great hunger, with every pore of his body open to the pure air. And he looked around at his neighbours' fields boastfully, comparing them with his own. Then he looked at his wife's little round black head and felt very proud of having her as his own. He leaned back on his elbow and took her hand in his. Shyly and in silence, not knowing

what to say and ashamed of their gentle feelings, for peasants are always ashamed of feeling refined, they finished eating and still sat hand in hand looking away into the distance. Everywhere the sowers were resting on little knolls, men, women and children sitting in silence. And the great calm of nature in spring filled the atmosphere around them. Everything seemed to sit still and wait until midday had passed. Only the gleaming sun chased westwards at a mighty pace, in and out through white clouds.

Then in a distant field an old man got up, took his spade and began to clean the earth from it with a piece of stone. The rasping noise carried a long way in the silence. That was the signal for a general rising all along the little valley. Young men stretched themselves and yawned. They walked slowly back to their ridges.

Martin's back and his wrists were getting a little sore, and Mary felt that if she stooped again over her seeds that her neck would break, but neither said anything and soon they had forgotten their tiredness in the mechanical movement of their bodies. The strong smell of the upturned earth acted like a drug on their nerves.

In the afternoon, when the sun was strongest, the old men of the village came out to look at their people sowing. Martin's grandfather, almost bent

double over his thick stick, stopped in the lane outside the field and, groaning loudly, he leaned over the fence.

"God bless the work," he called wheezily.

"And you, grandfather," replied the couple together, but they did not stop working.

"Ha!" muttered the old man to himself. "Ha! He sows well and that woman is good, too. They are beginning well."

It was fifty years since he had begun with his Mary, full of hope and pride, and the merciless soil had hugged them to its bosom ever since each spring without rest. But he did not think of that. The soil gives forgetfulness. Only the present is remembered in the spring, even by the aged who have spent their lives tilling the earth; so the old man, with his huge red nose and the spotted handkerchief tied around his skull under his black soft felt hat, watched his grandson work and gave him advice.

"Don't cut your sods so long," he would wheeze, "you are putting too much soil on your ridge."

"Ah, woman! Don't plant a seed so near the edge. The stalk will come out sideways."

And they paid no heed to him.

"Ah," grumbled the old man, "in my young days, when men worked from morning till night without tasting food, better work was done. But of course it

can't be expected to be the same as it was. The breed is getting weaker. So it is."

Then he began to cough in his chest and hobbled away to another field where his son Michael was working.

By sundown Martin had five ridges finished. He threw down his spade and stretched himself. All his bones ached and he wanted to lie down and rest. "It's time to be going home, Mary," he said.

Mary straightened herself, but she was too tired to reply. She looked at Martin wearily and it seemed to her that it was a great many years since they had set out that morning. Then she thought of the journey home and the trouble of feeding the pigs, putting the fowls into their coops and getting the supper ready and a momentary flash of rebellion against the slavery of being a peasant's wife crossed her mind. It passed in a moment. Martin was saying, as he dressed himself:

"Ha! My soul from the devil, it has been a good day's work. Five ridges done, and each one of them as straight as a steel rod. Begob, Mary it's no boasting to say that ye might well be proud of being the wife of Martin Delaney. And that's not saying the whole of it, my girl. You did your share better than any woman in Inverara could do it this blessed day."

They stood for a few moments in silence looking at the work they had done. All her dissatisfaction and weariness vanished from Mary's mind with the delicious feeling of comfort that overcame her at having done this work with her husband. They had done it together. They had planted seeds in the earth. The next day and the next and all their lives, when spring came they would have to bend their backs and do it until their hands and bones got twisted with rheumatism. But night would always bring sleep and forgetfulness.

As they walked home slowly Martin walked in front with another peasant talking about the sowing, and Mary walked behind, with her eyes on the ground, thinking.

Cows were lowing at a distance.

II

The Cow's Death

THE CALF WAS STILL-BORN. IT CAME FROM THE womb tail first. When its red, unwieldy body dropped on the green-sward it was dead. It lay with its head doubled about its neck in a clammy mass. The men stood about it and shook their heads in silence. The wife of the peasant who owned the cow sighed and said, "It is God's will." The cow moaned, mad with the pain of birth. Then she wheeled around cumbersomely, her hoofs driving into the soft earth beneath the weight of her body. She stooped over the calf and moaned, again smelling it. Then she licked the still body with her coarse tongue lovingly. The woman rubbed the cow's matted forehead, and there was a tear in her eye; for she too was a mother.

Then the cow, overcome once more with the pain, moved away from the calf and stood with her head bent low, breathing heavily through her nostrils. The breath came in long pale columns, like sunbeams coming through the window of a darkened church. They drove her away to a corner of the field, and she stood wearily with her head over the fence, lashing her flanks with her tail restlessly.

They seized the calf and dragged it by the feet

along the field to the fence, out through the fence into another field, then through another fence, then up the grassy slope that led to the edge of the cliff. They dropped it downwards into the sea. It lay in a pulped mass on the rocks. They rebuilt the gaps in the stone fences carefully and returned to the cow. The woman offered her a hot drink of oatmeal, but she refused it. They seized her and poured the drink down her throat, using a bull's horn as a funnel. The cow half swallowed the drink, half tossed it away with her champing mouth.

Then they went home, the woman still moaning the dead calf and apologizing to God for her sorrow. The peasant remained with the cow, watching until she should drop the bag. He buried it under a mound of stones. He dug his heel in the ground, and, taking a handful of the brown earth, he made the sign of the cross on the cow's side. Then he too went home.

For a long time the cow stood leaning over the fence, until the pain lessened. She turned around suddenly and lowed and tossed her head. She took a short run forward, the muscles of her legs creaking like new boots. She stopped again, seeing nothing about her in the field. Then she began to run around by the fence, putting her head over it here and there, lowing. She found nothing. Nothing answered her

call. She became wilder as the sense of her loss became clearer to her consciousness. Her eyes became red around the rims and fierce like a bull's. She began to smell around on the ground, half running, half walking, stumbling clumsily among the tummocks of grass.

There was where she had lain in travail, on the side of a little slope, the grass compressed and faded by the weight of her body. There was where she had given birth, the ground trampled by many feet and torn here and there, with the brown earth showing through. Then she smelt where the calf had lain. There were wet stains on the grass. She looked around her fiercely, and then she put her nose to the ground and started to follow the trail where they had dragged the calf to the fence. At the fence she stopped and smelt a long time, wondering with her stupid brain whither the trail led. And then stupidly she pressed with her great bulk against the fence. The stones cut her breast, but she pressed harder in terror and the fence fell before her. She stumbled through the gap and cut her left thigh near the udder. She did not heed the pain, but pressed forward, smelling the trail and snorting.

Faster she went, and now and again she raised her head and lowed – a long, mournful low that ended in a fierce *crescendo*, like a squall of wind coming

around a corner. At the second fence she paused again. Again she pressed against it, and again it fell before her. Going through the gap she got caught, and in the struggle to get through she cut both her sides along the flanks. The blood trickled through jaggedly, discolouring the white streak on the left flank.

She came at a run up the grassy slope to the cliff. She shuddered and jerked aside when she suddenly saw the sea and heard it rumbling distantly below – the waves seething on the rocks and the sea birds calling dismally with their noiseome cackle. She smelt the air in wonder. Then she slowly advanced, inch by inch, trembling. When she reached the summit, where the grass ended in a gravel belt that dropped down to the sheer slope of rock, she rushed backwards and circled around wildly, lowing. Again she came up, and planting her feet carefully on the gravel, she looked down. The trail of her calf ended there. She could follow it no further. It was lost in the emptiness beyond that gravel ledge. She tried to smell the air, but nothing reached her nostrils but the salt smell of the sea. She moaned and her sides heaved with the outrush of her breath. Then she looked down, straining out her neck. She saw the body of her calf on the rocks below.

She uttered a joyful cry and ran backwards, seek-

ing a path to descend. Up and down the summit of the cliff she went, smelling here and there, looking out over the edge, going on her knees and looking down and finding nowhere a path that led to the object on the rocks below. She came back again, her hind legs clashing as she ran, to the point where the body had been dropped over the precipice.

She strained out and tapped with her fore hoof, scratching the gravel and trying to descend, but there was nothing upon which she could place her feet – just a sheer drop of one hundred feet of cliff and her calf lay on the rocks below.

She stood stupidly looking at it a long time, without moving a muscle. Then she lowed, calling to her calf, but no answer came. She saw the water coming in with the tide, circling around the calf on the rocks. She lowed again, warning it. Wave after wave came in, eddying around the body. She lowed again and tossed her head wildly as if she wanted to buffet the waves with her horns.

And then a great wave came towering in, and catching up the calf on its crest swept it from the rocks.

And the cow, uttering a loud bellow, jumped headlong down.

III

Benedicamus Domino

THE COLLEGE CLOCK STRUCK ONCE. IT WAS FIVE minutes to one. The lay brothers began to march into their refectory from the long hall where they had assembled, the long hall with a stone floor on the left side of the college quadrangle. They moved very slowly, because Brother Silas, the shoemaker, went first and his deformed left leg forced him to go down the four stone steps sideways into the refectory, which Brother Euphronius, the laundryman, said was "more like a cellar than a refectory." And in fact it was very bare and sunk into the ground, so that the two windows on the far side from the door only let in a stray ray of sunshine. Sitting at table the brothers' eyes were on a level with the gravel drive that led to the college reception room and very often some of them were scandalized by seeing the legs of lady visitors pass, "with those shocking silk stockings they wear nowadays," as Brother Cornelius used to say with a twinkle in his eyes.

They all dipped their fingers in the Holy Water font within the door as they entered and then they filed to their places at the long table in the middle of the room. They all sniffed as they entered and

some sneezed, for the gas jet was lit and there was always a leakage at dinner hour, when the light was turned low. But if it were turned on full strength Brother Matthias, the housekeeper, promptly turned it down again, and as it was winter, it was impossible to see without it. So they sniffed and stood behind their covers, with their hands folded within their habit sleeves and their heads bent, shivering with the cold. Brother Silas mounted the rostrum at the rear and turned up the shaded light over it. Then he placed his "Life of Saint Theresa" on the stand and took up the Martyrology to find the passage. He was the reader for the day.

His life would be perfectly tranquil and happy if he didn't have to read aloud to the brothers at three meals once every eleven days. There were eleven other brothers and they all took turns, except Cornelius, the book-brother, who was the brother-in-charge and was exempt from reading. Old Silas had spent all the forenoon preparing his reading, for there were numerous foreign words and Latin quotations and there was always a titter when he made a mistake. And when Brother Cornelius rang his bell and called out "Silentium" to reprimand those who tittered, there was still more tittering, for "Silentium" was Silas's nick-name, because of his religious name Silas and his

morose and taciturn character. He opened the huge Martyrology and found out those who had been martyred on that date November 25th. "Gracious me," he muttered. There were more than half a dozen important people, given to the lions, crucified, and torn by wild horses at various dates and they all had indescribable names in Latin. He lifted his little black round skull cap and scratched his bald head with the little finger of his left hand. He put his wrinkled old face so near the open page that his spectacles touched the book and he could see nothing. So he took them off and began to wipe them with his handkerchief.

Brother Julian, standing at the end of the table beneath the rostrum, looked up at Silas and felt pity for "the old fool." For Brother Julian was already tired of wearing a lay brother's habit and looked upon the whole business with disgust. He pitied old Silas because the other brothers poked fun at him. He himself had been but six months in the Order and he had long since recovered from the religious fit that suddenly took possession of him one night in Paris, when he rushed from his studio and went to confession and joined the Order on the advice of the priest to whom he confessed. He was the youngest man in the room, no more than thirty. In fact there was something indecent about his

youth, in that assembly of old and withered men; just as if a racehorse in the pride of its youth were sent to stables with a number of worn-out cab-horses. Of course he would not be sent to that college, by the authorities at headquarters in Paris, nor indeed admitted into the Order, for only men past their youth were admitted, but Brother Julian was a good painter and the college required a great deal of painting to be done. And Brother Julian, looking at the round of beef at the far end of the table, waiting to be carved and distributed to the brethren by Brother Cornelius, thought that he had made an unfortunate mistake that night in Paris. All on account of a chit of a girl that didn't care a straw about him. He reflected now that he had chosen a very ridiculous and melodramatic form of revenge for her flirtation with the American sculptor Foster. And he was then almost on the verge of success. Of course they said his painting lacked imagination. But the technique was excellent. See how they exploited him here. Not only had he painted the main chapel, but the Grotto of the Blessed Virgin down by the lake in the grounds, and the priests' refectory. Hundreds of pounds worth. Work that might bring him fame in civilian life. And he could not even claim it. The rules ordered that his work should be unknown. Known

only to God. The priests would show it to visitors as work "done by one of our brothers." And they treated him as a servant. His ashy pale face went yellow as he thought of it, and Brother John who stood three covers down from him on the right-hand side looked at him and thought that he was struggling with a temptation and murmured a prayer to Saint Joseph to assist him.

But the thought that Brother Julian was being tempted thrust Brother John's thoughts back upon his own past life. His black round cap perched at the back of his skull accentuated the death-likeness of his head. There were only bones and skin, yellow, thin-lipped, hollow-eyed and ghastly. And there was a horrifying expression in his withered old body that was almost bent double, and in his lips that perpetually moved in prayer. But his mind was not listening to his prayers, in spite of all the devices that he used to drown its murmurings. It kept saying, "Brother Julian is being tempted, tempted, tempted, just as I, forty years ago, when I killed Jack Ryan, my cousin, when I caught him with my wife, and fled to France, to fight the Prussians, to forget, and never to forget; those potatoes will be cold, before Brother Cornelius comes to say grace, my God, my God, night and day, night and day, his face is always there, Jesus, Mary and Joseph,

and now he's tempted." And he suddenly began to strike his breast fiercely.

Everybody looked at Brother John and there was a smile on the faces of some, for some thought that he was mad to carry his devotion to such an extent. For they knew he wore a hair shirt and scourged himself and spent nights in the chapel on his knees in front of the tabernacle and ran around the lake three times every day at Angelus time. And others bowed their heads, for they considered him a saint and praised God that had brought them so near to such a saint. But Brother Joseph, who sat next to him, chuckled to himself and said, "Saint John the Baptist has got the tantrums to-day, so he'll leave his wine to me." For Brother Joseph, the stout little old orchard brother was a staid, placid German brother, who was more interested in wine and good living than in devotion to religion. His sallow face frowned as he looked around the table and saw that there was no cake for desert that day, and he realized that it was Thursday and not Wednesday as he thought when coming up from his orchard. He reflected that it was awfully mean of the Father Superior to allow the brothers cake only on Wednesdays and Sundays. He was very fond of cake. He always soaked it in his wine and let it melt in his mouth. But then he cheered up again, for as it

was Thursday he could go into the town for seeds. He always went on Thursday. Yes, he would bring a present of choice pears to . . .

Just then a woman's voice was heard outside the door and the door opened. The Dean of Discipline, Fr. McPhillip, was showing a visitor around the college. He was an aristocratic priest, slightly given to dissipation they said. He looked around the room, cracked the thumb and forefinger of his right hand and said, "This is the brothers' refectory." A brown fur muff appeared around the door, then the rim of a black hat, then a rosy-cheeked face with pouting lips, and a sweet voice said, "How delightfully interesting." Fr. McPhillip smiled, coughed behind his hand and went out pulling the door after him. As the door closed the brethren heard the sweet voice say, "Why do they eat in a cellar? It makes me feel so . . ."

Brother Aloysius who served in the students' refectory raised his eyebrows and nodded his head at Brother Euphronius, the laundryman. Brother Euphronius pursed up his lips and nodded his head in reply. The nodding was done in a melancholy fashion as became such old and responsible brothers as Euphronius and Aloysius, for the cause of the nodding was the fact that Brother Euphronius found a lady's handkerchief with the initials "C.S."

embroidered in gold letters in the corner among Fr. McPhillip's linen the week before last, and he communicated the fact to Brother Aloysius. And Brother Aloysius gazed meditatively at his plate and reflected that women are the cause of all evil, women and young students. For the young students threw pellets of bread at him, behind his back, in the refectory, and were always complaining of the tea being too weak, and the porridge being cold of a morning. And they made fun of his red wig and his long nose. And he was sorry just then, as he waited in the cold refectory for the clock to strike one and Brother Cornelius to come and say grace before the meat was cold, that he had not stayed as butler to Mrs. Norris of Closheen instead of becoming a brother. But he shrugged himself and murmured an Ave Maria against the temptation.

"How ridiculous that red wig looks on Brother Aloysius," thought Brother Euphronius, the laundryman. "I wonder is he related to Fr. Brown the Bursar? He has a wig just like him. But what a lazy man is Fr. Brown!" For Fr. Brown had a string attached to the bolt of his door, and he pulled the string to open the door when anybody knocked, so as to save him rising. And Brother Euphronius reflected that the priests had a far easier time than the brothers, and began to worry his head about

two bed sheets belonging to Fr. McNamara that had got lost in the laundry the week before. He might get into trouble about them.

Brother Matthew, the cellar-man, standing at the left-hand side of Brother Cornelius's place at the head of the table, felt his hip pocket under his habit. He had a pint bottle of cognac in his pocket. That was for Brother Cornelius. Brother Cornelius sold chocolates to the students at his book shop every Wednesday and Sunday. And Brother Matthew was very fond of chocolates. And Brother Cornelius was very fond of cognac.

Brother Simon, the carpenter brother, who had just arrived from France, and was trying to learn English, began to stroke his brown beard and looked around the table, saying to himself, "Meat, that is meat, plate, knife and fork, glass, *du vin*, *qu'est ce que ca*, *ah oui*, wine, *pommes de terre*, pot-pot-potta-toes, puteatoes, *non*, *non*, putatoes, salt, *moutarde*."

Everybody looked up as the door opened and Brother Cornelius entered. His girdle was too small for his girth and his head was too small for his body. He had soft white hands like a woman. He marched to the head of the table throwing his toes sideways like a policeman. He smelt the gas, then he smelt the meat, then he sighed and folded his hands in

his habit sleeves. Everybody coughed and Brother Julian drew in a deep breath through his nose. At that moment he decided to run away from the college and go back into the world.

The college clock struck four times. Then it struck once. It was one o'clock. The brothers took off their skull caps and held them in front of their breasts. They crossed themselves and bent their heads. Brother Cornelius began to say grace.

IV

The Wave

THE CLIFF WAS TWO HUNDRED FEET HIGH. IT sloped outwards from its grassy summit, along ten feet of brown gravel, down one hundred and seventy feet of grey limestone, giant slabs piled horizontally with large slits between the slabs where sea-birds nested. The outward slope came to a round point twenty feet from the base and there the cliff sank inwards, making a dark cavern along the cliff's face into the bowels of the earth. At the mouth the cavern was twenty feet high and at the rear its roof touched its floor, a flat rock that stretched from the base of the cliff to the sea. The cavern had a black-slate roof and at the rear there was a large streak of yellow gravel.

The cliff was semicircular. And at each corner a black jagged reef jutted from its base out into the sea. Between the reefs there was a little cove. But the sea did not reach to the semicircle of the cliff. Only its waves swept up from the deep over the flat rock to the cliff. The sea had eaten up the part of the cliff that rested on that semicircle of flat rock, during thousands of years of battle.

It was nearly high tide. But the sea moved so violently that the two reefs bared with each receding

wave until they seemed to be long shafts of black steel sunk into the bowels of the ocean. Their thick manes of red seaweed were sucked stiff by each fleeing wave. The waves came towering into the cove across both reefs, confusedly, meeting midway in the cove, chasing one another, climbing over one another's backs, spitting savage columns of green and white water vertically, when their arched manes clashed. In one monstrous stride they crossed the flat rock. Then with a yawning sound they swelled up midway in the cliff. There was a mighty roar as they struck the cliff and rebounded. Then they sank again, dishevelled masses of green and white, hurrying backward. They rose and fell from the bosom of the ocean, like the heavy breathing of a gluttonous giant.

Then the tide reached its highest point and there was a pause. The waves hardly made any noise as they struck the cliff, and they drivelled backwards slowly. The trough of the sea between the reefs was convulsing like water in a shaken glass. The cliff's face was black, drenched with brine, that streamed from its base, each tiny rivulet noisy in the sudden silence.

Then the silence broke. The sea rushed back. With the speed and motion of a bladder bursting it sprang backwards. Then it rose upwards in a concave wall, from reef to reef, across the cove, along

whose bottom the slimy weeds of the ocean depths were visible through the thin sheet of water left to cover the sea's nakedness by the fury of the rising wave.

For a moment the wave stood motionless, beautifully wild and immense. Its base in front was ragged, uneven and scratched with white foam, like the debris strewn around a just-constructed pyramid. Then a belt of dark blue ran from end to end across its face, sinking inwards in a perfect curve. Then came a wider belt, a green belt peppered with white spots. Then the wave's head curved outwards, arched like the neck of an angry swan. That curved head was a fathom deep, of a transparent green, with a rim of milky white. And to the rear, great lumps of water buttressed it, thousands of tons of water in each lump.

The wave advanced, slowly at first, with a rumbling sound. That awful mass of water advanced simultaneously from end to end of its length without breaking a ripple on its ice-smooth breast. But from its summit a shower of driven foam arose, from east to west, and fell backwards on to the shoulders of the sea, that came behind the wave in mountains pushing it to the cliff. The giant cliff looked small in front of that moving wall of blue and green and white water.

Then there was a roar. The wave sprang upwards to its full height. Its crest broke and points of water stuck out, curving downwards like fangs. It seemed to bend its head as it hurtled forward to ram the cliff. In a moment the wave and the cliff had disappeared in a tumbling mass of white water that yawned and hissed and roared. The whole semicircle of the cliff vanished in the white water and the foam mist that rose above it blotting out the sky. Just for one moment it was thus. In another moment the broken wave had fallen, flying to the sea in a thousand rushing fragments. The cliff appeared again.

But a great black mouth had opened in its face, at the centre, above the cavern. The cliff's face stood ajar, as if it yawned, tired of battle. The mouth was vertical in the cliff, like a ten-foot wedge stuck upwards from the edge of the cavern. Then the cliff tried to close the mouth. It pressed it on it from either side. But it did not close. The sides fell inwards and the mouth grew wider. The whole centre of the cliff broke loose at the top and swayed forward like a tree being felled. There was a noise like rising thunder. Black dust rose from the tottering cliff through the falling foam of the wave. Then with a soft splash the whole centre of the cliff collapsed into the cavern. The sides caved in with

another splash. A wall of grey dust arose shutting out everything. The rumbling of moving rocks came through the cloud of dust. Then the cloud rose and went inland.

The cliff had disappeared. The land sloped down to the edge of the cove. Huge rocks stood awkwardly on the very brink of the flat rock, with the rim of the sea playing between them. Smoke was rising from the fallen cliff. And the wave had disappeared. Already another one was gathering in the cove.

V

The Tramp

THERE WERE EIGHT PAUPERS IN THE CONVALESCENT yard of the workhouse hospital. The yard was an oblong patch of cement with the dining-room on one side and a high red-brick wall on the other. At one end was the urinal and at the other a little tarred wooden shed where there was a bathroom and a wash-house. It was very cold, for the sun had not yet risen over the buildings that crowded out the yard almost from the sky. It was a raw bleak February morning, about eight o'clock.

The paupers had just come out from breakfast and stood about uncertain what to do. What they had eaten only made them hungry and they stood shivering, making muffs of their coat sleeves, their little black woollen caps perched on their heads, some still chewing a last mouthful of bread, others scowling savagely at the ground as they conjured up memories of hearty meals eaten some time in the past.

As usual Michael Deignan and John Finnerty slouched off into the wash-house and leaned against the sink, while they banged their boots on the floor to keep warm. Deignan was very tall and lean. He had a pale melancholy face and there was something the matter with the iris of his right eye. It was not

blue like the other eye, but of an uncertain yellowish colour that made one think, somehow, that he was a sly, cunning, deceitful fellow, a totally wrong impression. His hair was very grey around the temples and fair elsewhere. The fingers of his hands were ever so long and thin and he was always chewing at the nails and looking at the ground, wrapped in thought.

"It's very cold," he said in a thin, weak, listless voice. It was almost inaudible.

"Yes," replied Finnerty gruffly, as he started up and heaved a loud sigh. "Ah –" he began and then he stopped, snorted twice to clear his nose, and let his head fall on his chest. He was a middle-sized, thick-set fellow, still in good condition and fat in the face, which was round and rosy, with grey eyes and very white teeth. His black hair was grown long and curled about his ears. His hands were round, soft and white, like a schoolmaster's.

The two of them stood leaning their backs against the washstand and stamped their feet in a moody silence for several minutes and then the tramp, who had been admitted to the hospital the previous night, wandered into the wash-house. He appeared silently at the entrance of the shed and paused there for a moment while his tiny blue eyes darted around piercingly yet softly, just like a graceful wild animal

might look through a clump of trees in a forest. His squat low body, standing between the tarred door-posts of the shed with the concrete wall behind and the grey sky overhead, was after a fashion menacing with the power and vitality it seemed to exude. So it seemed at least to the two dejected, listless paupers within the shed. They looked at the tramp with a mournful vexed expression and an envious gleam in their eyes and a furrowing of their foreheads and a shrinking of their flesh from this fresh dominant coarse lump of aggressive wandering life, so different to their own jaded, terror-stricken lives. Each thought, "Look at the red fat face of that vile tramp. Look at his fierce insulting eyes, that stare you in the face as boldly as a lion, or a child, and are impudent enough to have a gentle expression at the back of them, unconscious of malice. Look at that huge black beard that covers all his face and neck except the eyes and the nose and a narrow red slit for the mouth. My God, what throat muscles and what hair on his chest, on a day like this too, when I would die of cold to expose my chest that way!"

So each thought and neither spoke. As the tramp grinned foolishly – he just opened his beard, exposed red lips and red gums with stray blackened teeth scattered about them and then closed the beard again – the two paupers made no response. The

two of them were educated men, and without meaning it they shrank from associating with the unseemly dirty tramp on terms of equality, just as they spent the day in the wash-house in the cold, so as to keep away from the other paupers.

The tramp took no further notice of them. He went to the back of the shed and stood there looking out of the door and chewing tobacco. The other two men, conscious of his presence and irritated by it, fidgeted about and scowled. At last the tramp looked at Deignan, grinned, fumbled in his coat pocket, took out a crumpled cigarette and handed it to Deignan with another grin and a nodding of his head. But he did not speak.

Deignan had not smoked a cigarette for a week. As he looked at it for a moment in wonder, his bowels ached with desire for the little thin, crumpled, dirt-stained roll of tobacco held between the thumb and forefinger of the tramp's gnarled and mud-caked hand. Then with a contortion of his face as he tried to swallow his breath he muttered, "You're a brick," and stretched out a trembling hand. In three seconds the cigarette was lit and he was inhaling the first delicious puff of drug-laden smoke. His face lit up with a kind of delicious happiness. His eyes sparkled. He took three puffs and was handing the cigarette to his friend when the tramp spoke.

"No, keep it yerself, towny," he said in his even, effortless, soft voice. "I've got another for him."

And then when the two paupers were smoking, their listlessness vanished and they became cheerful and talkative. The two cigarettes broke down the barriers of distrust and contempt between themselves and the tramp. His unexpected act of generosity had counteracted his beard and the degraded condition of his clothes. He was not wearing a pauper's uniform, but a patched corduroy trousers and numbers of waistcoats and tattered coats of all colours, piled indiscriminately on his body and held together not by buttons but by a cord tied around his waist. They accepted him as a friend. They began to talk to him.

"You just came in for the night?" asked Deignan. There was still a condescending tone in the cultured accents.

The tramp nodded. Then after several seconds he rolled his tobacco to the other cheek, spat on the floor and hitched up his trousers.

"Yes," he said, "I walked from Drogheda yesterday and I landed in Dublin as tired as a dog. I said to myself that the only place to go was in here. I needed a wash, a good bed and a rest, and I had only ninepence, a piece of steak, a few spuds and an onion. If I bought a bed they'd be all gone and

now I've had a good sleep, a warm bath, and I still have my ninepence and my grub. I'll start off as soon as I get out at eleven o'clock and maybe walk fifteen miles before I put up for the night somewhere."

"But how did you get into the hospital ward?" asked Finnerty, eyeing the tramp with a jealous look. The cigarette had accentuated Finnerty's feeling of hunger, and he was irritated at the confident way the tramp talked of walking fifteen miles that day and putting up somewhere afterwards.

"How did I get in?" said the tramp. "That's easy. I got a rash on my right leg this three years. It always gets me into the hospital when I strike a workhouse. It's easy."

Again there was a silence. The tramp shuffled to the door and looked out into the yard. The sky overhead was still grey and bleak. The water that had been poured over the concrete yard to wash it two hours before, still glistened in drops and lay in little pools here and there. There was no heat in the air to dry it.

The other six paupers, three old men with sticks, two young men and a youth whose pale face was covered with pimples, were all going about uncertainly, talking in a tired way and peering greedily in through the windows of the dining-room, where

old Neddy, the pauper in charge of the dining-room, was preparing the bread and milk for the dinner ration. The tramp glanced around at all this and then shrugged his shoulders and shuffled back to the end of the wash-house.

"How long have you been in here?" he asked Deignan.

Deignan stubbed the remainder of his cigarette against his boot, put the quenched piece in the lining of his cap and then said, "I've been here six months."

"Educated man?" said the tramp. Deignan nodded. The tramp looked at him, went to the door and spat and then came back to his former position :

"I'll say you're a fool," he said quite coolly. "There doesn't look to be anything the matter with you. In spite of your hair, I bet you're no more than thirty-five. Eh?"

"That's just right about my age, but –"

"Hold on," said the tramp. "You are as fit as a fiddle, this is a spring morning, and yer loafing in here and eating yer heart out with hunger and misery instead of taking to the roads. What man! You're mad. That's all there's to it." He made a noise with his tongue as if driving a horse and began to clap his hands on his bare chest. Every time he hit his chest there was a dull heavy sound like distant thunder. The noise was so loud that Deignan could

not speak until the tramp stopped beating his chest. He stood wriggling his lips and winking his right eye in irritation against what the tramp had said and jealousy of the man's strength and endurance, beating his bare hairy chest that way on such a perishing day. The blows would crush Deignan's ribs and the exposure would give him pneumonia.

"It's all very well for you to talk," he began querulously. Then he stopped and looked at the tramp. It occurred to him that it would be ridiculous to talk to a tramp about personal matters. But there was something aggressive and dominant and yet absolutely unemotional in the tramp's fierce stare that drove out that feeling of contempt. Instead Deignan felt spurred to defend himself. "How could you understand me?" he continued. "As far as you can see I am all right. I have no disease but a slight rash on my back and that comes from underfeeding, from hunger and . . . and depression. My mind is sick. But of course you don't understand that."

"Quite right," said Finnerty, blowing cigarette smoke through his nostrils moodily. "I often envy those who don't think. I wish I were a farm labourer."

"Huh." The tramp uttered the exclamation in a heavy roar. Then he laughed loudly and deeply, stamped his feet and banged his chest. His black

beard shook with laughter. "Mother of Mercy," he cried, "I'll be damned but you make me laugh, the two of you."

The two shuffled with their feet and coughed and said nothing. They became instantly ashamed of their contemptuous thoughts for the tramp, he who a few minutes before had given them cigarettes. They suddenly realized that they were paupers, degraded people, and contemptible people for feeling superior to a fellow man because he was a tramp. They said nothing. The tramp stopped laughing and became serious.

"Now look here," he said to Deignan, "what were you in civilian life, as they say to soldiers, what did you do before you came in here?"

"Oh the last job I had was a solicitor's clerk," murmured Deignan, biting his nails. "But that was only a stopgap, I can't say that I ever had anything permanent. Somehow I always seemed to drift. When I left college I tried for the Consular Service and failed. Then I stayed at home for a year at my mother's place in Tyrone. She has a little estate there. Then I came to Dublin here. I got disgusted hanging around at home. I fancied everybody was pitying me. I saw everybody getting married or doing something while I only loafed about, living on my mother. So I left. Landed here with two

portmanteaux and eighty-one pounds. It's six years ago next fifteenth of May. A beautiful sunny day it was too."

Deignan's plaintive voice drifted away into silence and he gnawed his nails and stared at the ground. Finnerty was trying to get a last puff from the end of his cigarette. He was trying to hold the end between his thumbs and puckered up his lips as if he were trying to drink boiling milk. The tramp silently handed him another cigarette and then he turned to Deignan.

"What did ye do with the eighty-one quid?" he said. "Did ye drink it or give it to the women?"

Finnerty, cheered by the second cigarette which he had just lit, uttered a deep guffaw and said, "Ha, the women blast them, they're the curse of many a man's life," but Deignan started up and his face paled and his lips twitched.

"I can assure you," he said, "that I never touched a woman in my life." He paused as if to clear his mind of the horror that the tramp's suggestion had aroused in him. "No, I can't say I drank it. I can't say I did anything at all. I just drifted from one job to another. Somehow, it seemed to me that nothing big could come my way and that it didn't matter very much how I spent my life, because I would be a failure anyway. Maybe I did drink too much once

in a while, or dropped a few pounds at a race meeting, but nothing of any account. No, I came down just because I seemed naturally to drift downwards and I couldn't muster up courage to stop myself. I . . . I've been here six months . . . I suppose I'll die here."

"Well I'll be damned," said the tramp. He folded his arms on his chest, and his chest heaved in and out with his excited breathing. He kept looking at Deignan and nodding his head. Finnerty who had heard Deignan's story hundreds of times with numberless details shrugged his shoulders, sniffed and said: "Begob, it's a funny world. Though I'm damn sure that I wouldn't be here only for women and drink."

"No?" said the tramp. "How do you make that out?"

"No, by Jiminy," said Finnerty, blowing out a cloud of blue smoke through his mouth as he talked. "I'd be a rich man to-day only for drink and women." He crossed his feet and leaned jauntily back against the washstand, with his hands held in front of him, the fingers of the right hand tapping the back of the left. His fat round face, with the heavy jaw, turned sideways towards the doorway, looked selfish, stupid and cruel. He laughed and said in an undertone, "Oh boys, oh boys, when I

come to think of it." Then he coughed and shrugged his shoulders. "Would you believe it," he said turning to the tramp, "I've spent five thousand pounds within the last twelve months? It's a fact. Upon my soul I have. I curse the day I got hold of that money. Until two years ago I was a happy man, I had one of the best schools in the south of Ireland. Then an aunt of mine came home from America and stayed in the house with my mother and myself. She died within six months and left mother five thousand pounds. I got it out of the old woman's hands, God forgive me, and then. . . . Oh well," Finnerty shook his head solemnly, raised his eyebrows and sighed. "I'm not sorry," he continued, leering at a black spot on the concrete floor of the wash-house. "I could count the number of days I was sober on my fingers and thumbs. And now I'd give a month of my life for a cup of tea and a hunk of bread." He stamped about clapping his hands and laughing raucously. His bull neck shook when he laughed. Then he scowled again and said, "Wish I had a penny. That's nine o'clock striking. I'm starving with the hunger."

"Eh? Hungry?" The tramp had fallen into a kind of doze while Finnerty had been talking. He started up, scratched his bare neck and then rummaged within his upper garments mumbling to himself.

At last he drew forth a little bag from which he took three pennies. He handed the pennies to Finnerty. "Get chuck for the three of us," he said.

Finnerty's eyes gleamed, he licked his lower lip with his tongue and then he darted out without saying a word.

In the workhouse hospital a custom had grown up, since goodness knows when, that the pauper in charge of the dining-room was allowed to filch a little from the hospital rations, of tea, bread and soup, and then sell them to the paupers again as extras at nine o'clock in the morning for a penny a portion. This fraudulent practice was overlooked by the ward-master; for he himself filched all his rations from the paupers' hospital supply and he did it with the connivance of the workhouse master, who was himself culpable in other ways and was therefore prevented by fear from checking his subordinates. But Finnerty did not concern himself with these things. He dived into the dining-room, held up the three pennies before old Neddy's face and whispered "Three." Neddy, a lean wrinkled old pauper with a very thick red under-lip like a negro, was standing in front of the fire with his hands folded under his dirty check apron. He counted the three pennies, mumbling, and then put them in his pocket. During twenty years he had

collected ninety-three pounds in that manner. He had no relatives to whom he could bequeath the money, he never spent any and he never would leave the workhouse until his death, but he kept on collecting the money. It was his only pleasure in life. When he had collected a shilling in pennies he changed it into silver and the silver in due course into banknotes.

"They say he has a hundred pounds," thought Finnerty, his mouth dry with greed, as he watched Neddy put away the pennies. "Wish I knew where it was. I'd strangle him here and now and make a run for it. A hundred pounds. I'd eat and eat and eat and then I'd drink and drink."

The tramp and Deignan never spoke a word until Finnerty came back, carrying three bowls of tea and three hunks of bread on a white deal board. Deignan and Finnerty immediately began to gulp their tea and tear at the bread, but the tramp merely took a little sip at the tea and then took up his piece of bread, broke it in two, and gave a piece to each of the paupers.

"I'm not hungry," he said. "I've got my dinner with me, and as soon as I get out along the road in the open country I'm going to sit down and cook it. And it's going to be a real spring day, too. Look at that sun."

The sun had at last mounted the wall. It was streaming into the yard lighting up everything. It was not yet warm, but it was cheering and invigorating. And the sky had become a clear pure blue colour.

"Doesn't it make ye want to jump and shout," cried the tramp, joyously stamping about. He had become very excited, seeing the sun.

"I'm afraid I'd rather see a good dinner in front of me," muttered Finnerty with his mouth full of bread.

"What about you, towny?" said the tramp, standing in front of Deignan. "Wouldn't ye like to be walking along a mountain road now with a river flowing under yer feet in a valley and the sun tearing at yer spine?"

Deignan looked out wistfully, smiled for a moment dreamily and then sighed and shook his head. He sipped his tea and said nothing. The tramp went to the back of the shed. Nobody spoke until they had finished the bread and tea. Finnerty collected the bowls.

"I'll take these back," he said, "and maybe I might get sent over to the cookhouse for something."

He went away and didn't come back. The tramp and Deignan fell into a contemplative doze. Neither spoke until the clock struck ten. The tramp

shrugged himself and coming over to Deignan, tapped him on the arm.

"I was thinking of what you said about . . . about how you spent your life, and I thought to myself, 'Well, that poor man is telling the truth and he's a decent fellow, and it's a pity to see him wasting his life in here.' That's just what I said to myself. As for that other fellow. He's no good. He's a liar. He'll go back again to his school or maybe somewhere else. But neither you nor I are fit to be respectable citizens. The two of us were born for the road, towny. Only you never had the courage of your convictions."

The tramp went to the door and spat. Deignan had been looking at him in wonder while he was talking and now he shifted his position restlessly and furrowed his forehead.

"I can't follow you," he said nervously and he opened his mouth to continue, when again he suddenly remembered that the man was a tramp and that it would not be good form to argue with him on matters of moral conduct.

"Of course ye can't," said the tramp, shuffling back to his position. Then he stuck his hands within his sleeves and shifted his tobacco to his other cheek. "I know why you can't follow me. You're a Catholic, you believe in Jesus Christ and the Blessed Vir-

gin and the priests and a heaven hereafter. You like to be called respectable and to pay your debts. You were born a free man like myself, but you didn't have the courage . . ."

"Look here, man," cried Deignan in a shocked and angry voice, "stop talking that rubbish. You have been very kind about – er – cigarettes and food, but I can't allow you to blaspheme our holy religion in my presence. Horrid. Ugh."

The tramp laughed noiselessly. There was silence for several moments. Then the tramp went up to Deignan, shook him fiercely by the right arm and shouted in his ear, "You're the biggest fool I ever met." Then he laughed aloud and went back to his place. Deignan began to think that the tramp was mad and grew calm and said nothing.

"Listen here," said the tramp. "I was born disreputable. My mother was a fisherman's daughter and my lawful father was a farm labourer, but my real father was a nobleman and I knew it when I was ten years old. That's what gave me a disreputable outlook on life. My father gave mother money to educate me, and of course she wanted to make me a priest. I said to myself, I might as well be one thing as another. But at the age of twenty-three when I was within two years of ordination a servant girl had a child and I got expelled. She followed me,

but I deserted her after six months. She lost her looks after the birth of the child. I never clapped eyes on her or the child since." He paused and giggled. Deignan bit his lip and his face contorted with disgust.

"I took to the road then," said the tramp. "I said to myself that it was a foolish game trying to do anything in this world but sleep and eat and enjoy the sun and the earth and the sea and the rain. That was twenty-two years ago. And I'm proud to say that I never did a day's work since and never did a fellow-man an injury. That's my religion and it's a good one. Live like the birds, free. That's the only way for a free man to live. Look at yourself in a looking-glass. I'm ten years older than you and yet you look old enough to be my father. Come, man, take to the road with me to-day. I know you're a decent fellow, so I'll show you the ropes. In six months from now you'll forget you were ever a pauper or a clerk. What d'ye say?"

Deignan mused, looking at the ground.

"Anything would be better than this," he muttered. "But . . . Good Lord, becoming a tramp! I may have some chance of getting back to respectable life from here, but once I became a tramp I should be lost."

"Lost? What would you lose?"

Deignan shrugged his shoulders.

"I might get a job. Somebody might discover me here. Somebody might die. Anything might happen. But if I went on the road . . ." He shrugged his shoulders again.

"So you prefer to remain a pauper?" said the tramp with an impudent, half-contemptuous grin. Deignan winced and he felt a sudden mad longing grow within his head to do something mad and reckless.

"You're a fine fellow," continued the tramp, "you prefer to rot in idleness here with old men and useless wrecks to coming out into the free air. What man! Pull yerself together and come over now with me and apply for yer discharge. We'll foot it out together down south. What d'ye say?"

"By Jove, I think I will!" cried Deignan with a gleam in his eyes. He began to trot excitedly around the shed, going to the door and looking up at the sky, and coming back again and looking at the ground, fidgeting with his hands and feet. "D'ye think, would it be all right?" he kept saying to the tramp.

"Sure it will be all right," the tramp kept answering. "Come on with me to the ward master and ask for your discharge."

But Deignan would not leave the shed. He had

never in all his life been able to come to a decision on an important matter.

"Do you think, would it be all right?" he kept saying.

"Oh damn it and curse it for a story," said the tramp at last, "stay where you are and good day to you. I'm off."

He shuffled out of the shed and across the yard. Deignan put out his hand and took a few steps forward.

"I say –" he began and then stopped again. His brain was in a whirl thinking of green fields, mountain rivers, hills clad in blue mists, larks singing over clover fields, but something made him unable to loosen his legs, so that they could run after the tramp.

"I say –" he began again, and then he stopped and his face shivered and beads of sweat came out on his forehead.

He could not make up his mind.

VI

The Rockfish

FLOP. THE CONE-SHAPED BAR OF LEAD TIED TO THE end of the fishing-line dropped into the sea without causing a ripple. It sank rapidly through the long seaweed that grew on the face of the rock. It sank twenty-five feet and then struck the bottom. It tumbled around and then lay on its side in a niche at the top of a round pool. The man on top of the rock hauled in his line until it was taut. The bar of lead, bobbed up and down twice. Then it rested straight on its end in the niche. Three short plaits of stiff horsehair extended crookedly like tentacles from the line above the leaden weight at regular intervals. At the end of each plait was a hook baited all over with shelled periwinkle. A small crab, transfixed through the belly, wriggled on the lowest hook. The two upper hooks had a covering of crushed crab tied by thin strings around the periwinkles. The three baited hooks swung round and round, glistening white through the red strands of broad seaweed that hung lazily from their stems in the rock face. Dark caverns at the base of the rock cast long shadows out over the bottom of the sea about the hooks. Little bulbous things growing in groups on the bottom spluttered methodically as they stirred.

The man sitting above on the top of the rock spat into the sea. Resting his fishing-rod in the crutch of his right arm, he began to fill his pipe, yawning.

A little rockfish came rushing out from a cavern under the rock. He whisked his tail and stopped dead behind a huge blade of seaweed when he saw the glistening baits. His red scaly body was the colour of the weed. It tapered from the middle to the narrow tail and to the triangular-shaped head. He stared at the baits for a long time without moving his body. His gills rose and fell steadily. Then he flapped his tail and glided to the upper hook. He touched it with his snout. He nibbled at it timorously three times. Then he snatched at the top of it and darted away back into the cavern with a piece of periwinkle in his mouth. The man on the rock sat up excitedly, threw his pipe on the rock, and seized the rod with both hands, breathing through his nose.

Several rockfish gathered around the little fellow in the cavern. They tried to snatch the piece of periwinkle from his mouth. But he dived under a ledge of rock and bolted it hurriedly. Then, all the rockfish darted out to the hooks. The little ones scurried around hither and thither. Three middle-sized ones stood by the two upper hooks, sniffing at them. Then they began to nibble carefully. One little rockfish stood on his head over the bottom hook

and sniffed at it. But the crab wriggled one leg and the rockfish darted away at a terrific speed. All the rockfish darted away after it into the cavern. Then one of the middle-sized ones came back again alone. He went up to the highest hook and grabbed at it immediately. He took the whole bait from it. The hook grazed his lower lip as it slipped from his mouth. The rockfish dropped the bait, turned a somersault, and dived into the cavern.

The man on the rock swung his rod back over his head, and dropped it forward again with an oath when he found the line coming slack. "Missed," he said. Then the leaden weight slipped back again into the niche. A crowd of rockfish quarrelled over the pieces of periwinkle fallen from the middle-sized fellow's mouth. The pieces, too light to sink, kept floating about. Then they disappeared one by one into the fishes' mouths.

A huge rockfish prowled in from the deep. He stood by the corner of a rock watching the little ones quarrel over the pieces of fallen bait. He was as big as all the others together. He must have been three feet long and his middle was as thick as a bull-dog's chest. The scales on his back were all the colours of the rainbow. His belly was a dun colour. He stood still for a time, watching like an old bull, his gills showing large red cavities in his throat as they

opened. Then he swooped in among the little ones. They dived away from him into the cavern. He gobbled the remaining pieces of bait. Then he turned around slowly twice and swam close to the bottom towards the hooks. He saw the crab wriggling on the lowest hook. With a rush he swallowed the crab and the hook, turned about and rushed away with it, out towards his lair in the deep. The leaden weight rushed along the bottom with him. The line went taut with a snap over his back. The fishing-rod was almost wrenched from the hands of the man on the rock. Its tip touched the water. Then the man heaved the rod over his head and grasped the line. The hook was wrenched back out of the rockfish's gullet and its point tore through the side of his mouth.

The rockfish was whirled about by the wrench and dragged backwards headlong. With a swishing sound he heaved straight through the water towards the cavern. Then the line went taut again as the man hauled in. The rockfish was tugged up along the face of the rock. He jumped twice and heaved. He tore a strip of the soft thick skin in which the hook was embedded from his jaw at one end. Hanging to the hook by this strip, he came up gasping through the hanging weeds. The man groaned as he heaved.

Then the bared top hook got caught in a broad blade of seaweed. It combed its way through to the hard stem and then got stuck. The man heaved and could draw it no farther. The rockfish hung exhausted from the bottom hook. The man stuck his right foot against a ledge and leaning back with the line held in his two hands across his stomach he pulled with all his might. The top hook broke. The line jerked up. The rockfish reached the surface. He tried to breathe with wide open mouth. Then he hurled himself into the air and dived headlong downwards. The hanging strip of skin parted from his jaw. He was free.

VII

The Landing

TWO OLD WOMEN WERE SITTING ON THE ROCKS that lay in a great uneven wall along the seashore beyond the village of Rundangan. They were knitting. Their red petticoats formed the only patch of colour among the grey crags about them and behind them. In front of them stretched the sea, blue and calm. It sparkled far out where the sun was shining on it. The sky was blue and empty and the winds were silent. The only noise came from the sea, near the shore, where it was just low tide. The water babbled and flopped along the seaweed on the low rocks that lay afar out, black strips of rocks with red seaweed growing on them. It was a spring evening and the air was warm and fresh, as if it had just been sprinkled with eau de cologne or something. The old women were talking in low voices sleepily as they knitted woollen stockings. "Ah yes," said one of them called Big Bridget Conlon, an old woman of seventy, a woman of great size and strength, with big square jaws like a man, high cheekbones, red complexion and wistful blue eyes that always seemed to be in mourning about something. She made a wedge of a corner of the little black shawl that was tied around her neck and

cleaned out her right ear with it. "I don't know," she said, "why it is, but I always get a pain in that ear when there's bad weather coming. There it is now, just as if there was a little stream running along inside in it. My grandmother, God have mercy on her, suffered the same way."

"Yes," said the other woman, with a lazy and insincere sigh, "there is no going against tokens that are sent that way." The other woman, Mary Mullen, was only sixty-five and her reddish hair had not yet turned very grey. She had shifty grey eyes and she was very thin about the body. She was greatly feared in the fishing village of Rundangan for her slandering tongue and her habit of listening by night at other people's doors to eavesdrop on their conversation.

"Heh, heh," said Big Bridget, looking out mournfully at the sea, "sure, we only live by the Grace of God, sure enough, with the sea always watching to devour us. And yet only for it we would starve. Sure, many a thing is a queer thing, sure enough." She stuck the end of a knitting needle against her teeth and leaned her head against it. With brooding eyes she looked out at the sea that way, as if she were trying to explain something to herself.

The two old women lapsed into silence again and knitted away. The tide turned and it began to flow.

From where the women sat the land stretched out on either side into the sea. To the east of them, it stretched out in high cliffs, and to the west it ran along almost level with the sea for about a mile, a bare stretch of naked grey rock strewn with boulders. Farther west it rose gradually into high cliffs. Now a light breeze crept along the crags in fitful gusts, here and there, irregularly. The women did not notice it.

Then suddenly a sharp gust of wind came up from the sea and blew the old women's petticoats in the air like balloons. It fluttered about viciously for a few moments and then disappeared again. The old women sniffed anxiously and rolled up their knitting by a common impulse before they spoke a word. They looked at one another with furrowed brows.

"What did I say to you, Mary?" said Big Bridget in an awed whisper, in which however there was a weird melancholy note of intense pleasure. She covered her mouth with the palm of her right hand and then made a motion as if she were throwing her teeth at the other woman. It was a customary gesture with her. "That pain in my ear is always right," she continued; "it's a storm sure enough."

"God between us and all harm," said Mary Mullen, "and that man of mine is out fishing with my son

Patrick and Stephen Halloran. Good mother of mercy," she whimpered uneasily as she got to her feet, "they are the only people out fishing from the whole village and a storm is coming. Amn't I the unfortunate woman. Drowned, drowned they will be." Suddenly she worked herself into a wild frenzy of fear and lamentation and she spread her hands out toward the sea. Standing on the summit of the line of boulders with her hands stretched out and wisps of her grey hair flying about her face, while the rising and whistling wind blew her red petticoat backwards so that her lean thighs were sharply outlined, she began to curse the sea and bemoan her fate.

"Oh, God forgive you, woman of no sense," cried Big Bridget, struggling to her feet with difficulty on account of the rheumatic pains she had in her right hip; "what is this you are saying? Abandoned woman, don't tempt the sea with your words. Don't talk of drowning." There was a sudden ferocity in her words that was strangely akin to the rapid charges of the wind coming up from the sea about them, cold, contemptuous and biting, like bullets flying across a battlefield fired by unknown men against others whom they have never met, the fierce and destructive movement of maddened nature, blind, and rejoicing in madness. And Mary Mullen,

with her hands outstretched, paid no heed to Big Bridget, but shrieked at the top of her voice "Drowned, drowned they will be." She also seemed to be possessed with a frenzy in which sorrow and joy had lost their values and had intermingled in some emotion that transcended themselves. The sea began to swell and break its back with rivulets of foam.

People came running down to the beach from the village as the storm grew in intensity. They gathered together on the wall of boulders with the two old women. Soon there was a cluster of red petticoats and heads hooded in little black shawls, while the men stood about talking anxiously and looking out to sea towards the west. The sea was getting rougher with every wave that broke along the rocky beach. It began to growl and toss about and make noises as if monstrous teeth were being ground. It became alive and spoke with a multitude of different yells that inspired the listeners with horror and hypnotized them into feeling mad with the sea. Their faces set in a deep frown and their eyes had a distant fiery look in them. They shouted when they spoke to one another. Each contradicted the other. They swore angrily. They strutted about on the boulders with their hands behind their backs, looking at the sea suspiciously as if they thought it was going to rush up each minute and devour them.

Stephen Halloran's wife squatted down on a boulder beside Mary Mullen and the two women, whose men were out fishing, became the centre of interest. They arrogated to themselves a vast importance from the fact that their men were in danger of death from a common enemy, the sea. Their faces were lengthened with an expression of sorrow, but there was a fierce pride in their sharp eyes that looked out at the sea with hatred, like the wives of ancient warriors who watched on the ramparts of stone forts while their men fought in front with stone battle-axes against the enemy. Stephen Halloran's wife, a weak featured, pale faced woman with weak eyes that were devoid of eyelashes and were red around the rims, kept rolling her little head from side to side as she searched the sea to the west, looking out from under her eyebrows and from under the little black shawl that covered her head.

"Ah yes," she was saying, as she rocked her head, "I told him this morning when he was setting his hooks in order, not to attempt going out, on account of the day that was in it, because it was this day twenty year ago, if anybody remembers it, that my grandfather died of pneumonia."

"Drowned, drowned they will be," shrieked Mary Mullen. She had gone on her two knees on a boulder and she had put on a man's frieze waistcoat. She

looked like a diver in it, the way it was buttoned up around her neck and three sizes too big for her.

The crashing of the waves against the cliffs to the east was drowning the wind. The wind came steadily, like the rushing of a great cataract heard at a great distance, but the noises of the sea were continually changing, rising and falling, with the stupendous modulations of an orchestra played by giants. Each sound boomed or hissed or crashed with a horrid distinctness. It stood apart from the other sounds that followed and preceded it as menacing and overwhelming as the visions that crowd on a disordered mind, each standing apart from the others in crazy independence.

Then the curragh with the three men rowing in it hove into sight from the west. A cliff jutted out into the sea, forming a breakwater where its sharp wedge-shaped face ended. Around that cliff the curragh appeared, a tiny black dot on the blue and white sea. For a moment the people saw it and they murmured in an awed loud whisper: "There they are." Then the curragh disappeared. It seemed to those on the beach that a monstrous wave surmounted it callously and that it had been engulfed and lost for ever, swallowed into the belly of the ocean. The women shrieked and threw their hands across their breasts and some said, "Oh Blessed

Virgin, succour us." But the men simply said to one another, "That was the 'Wave of the Reaping Hook' that came down on them." Still the men had their mouths open and they held their breaths and their bodies leaned forward from the hips watching for the curragh to appear again. It did appear and there was an excited murmur "Hah, God with them."

From the promontory where the curragh had just passed there was a lull in the water for a long way and the people could see the curragh coming along it all the time without losing sight of it. They could see the men rowing in it. They said, "That's Stephen Halloran in the stern. It's a mistake to have him in the stern. He's too weak on his oars for a rough day." They began to move cautiously down to the brink of the sea, where the curragh would have to effect a landing. As the moment when the curragh would have to risk the landing and the black rocks, on which the three men might be dashed to pieces by the ferocious sea, came near, the men on the beach grew more excited and some shivered. The women began to wail. A great babble of voices rose from the beach, harsh and confused, like the voices of demented people. All gave advice and none took heed of the advice given.

The place where the curragh would have to effect

a landing was in the middle of the little cove. It was a jagged rock with a smooth space at the brink of the left-hand corner, where a slab had been cut out of it by a thunderclap a few years before. In calm weather the sea just reached level with the rock at half tide and it was easy to land a curragh there. But now the waves were coming over it like hills that had been overturned and were being rolled along a level plain speedily. The men on the beach stood at the edge of the rock and the line of boulders, fifty yards away from the edge of the sea. Yet the waves were coming to their feet when the sea swelled up. They shook their heads and looked at one another.

Peter Mullen's brother, a lanky man with a lame leg, made a megaphone of his hands and shouted to the men in the curragh, "Keep away as long as ye can, ye can't come through this sea," but he couldn't be heard ten yards away on account of the noise of the sea and of the wind. The curragh approached until it was within two hundred yards of the landing-place. The people on the beach could see the faces of the rowers distinctly. Their faces were distorted and wild. Their bodies were taut with fear and they moved jerkily with their oars, their legs stiff against the sides of the boat, their teeth bared. Two hundred yards away they turned their boat suddenly

sideways and began to row away from the landing-place. Silence fell on those on the beach. The men looked eagerly out at the boat. The women rose to their feet and clasped one another. For half a minute there was silence that way while the men in the boat manœuvred for position.

Then simultaneously a cry arose from the men on the beach and from the men in the boat. With a singing sound of oars grating against the polished wet wood of the gunwale the curragh swung around to the landing. The singing sound of the oars and the ferocious snapping of the men's breath as they pulled could be heard over the roar of the sea, it came so suddenly. The boat swung in towards the rocks. In a few moments the rowers would be smashed to pieces or in safety.

Then the women standing on the boulders became mad with excitement. They did not shrink in fear from looking at the snaky black canvas coated boat, with three men in her, that was cutting the blue and white water, dashing in on the rocks. They screamed and there was a wild, mad joy in their screams. Big Bridget's eyes were no longer mournful. They were fiery like a man's. All the women except Mary Mullen and Stephen Halloran's wife looked greedily at the curragh, but at the same time they tore their hair and screamed with pretended fear. Mary

Mullen fell on her face on the boulder and resting her chin on her hands, she kept biting her little finger and saying in a whisper to herself, "Oh noble son of my womb." Stephen Halloran's wife rolled herself in her shawl low down between two boulders and went into hysterics.

And the men in the rapidly advancing boat yelled too, a mad joyous yell, as if the rapidity of their movement, the roaring of the sea, the hypnotic power of the green and white water about them and the wind overhead screaming, had driven out fear. In the moment of delirium when their boat bore down on death they no longer feared death.

The boat, the crew, the men on the beach, the women on the boulder were all mingled together for a wild moment in a common contempt of danger. For a moment their cries surmounted the sound of the wind and sea. It was the defiance of humanity hurled in the face of merciless nature. And then again there was a strained pause. The noise of voices vanished suddenly and silence came.

On the back of a wave the boat came riding in, the oars stretched out, their points tipping the water. Then the oars dipped. There was a creak, a splash, a rushing sound, a panting of frightened breath, a hurried mumble of excited voices rose from the men on the beach. The men on the beach waited

in two lines with clasped hands. The foremost men were up to their waist in water. The boat rushed in between the two lines. They seized the boat. The wave passed over their heads. There was a wild shriek and then confusion. The boat and the foremost men were covered by the wave. Then the wave receded. The boat and the crew and the men holding the boat were left on the rock, clinging to the rock and to one another, like a dragged dog clings to the earth.

They rushed up the rock with the boat. They had landed safely.

VIII

Beauty

THEY PAUSED TO TAKE BREATH. THEY HAD ALMOST run up the steep slope of the field from the rear of the house. On fire with passion they had been unconscious of the stiff climb. In the stillness of the warm summer night their breathing sounded like the thudding of two propellers heard distantly from the bowels of a ship. His arm was about her waist. His moist fingers crushed the silk of her dress. Her head leaned against his shoulder. They were both flushed with wine. Their eyes gleamed lasciviously. Between breaths they both laughed lowly and thickly.

He glanced back, down the slope towards the house. He could see the lights through the trees of the orchard. They flickered as if they were grinning, through the waving leaves. Sounds of music came. He shut one eye as his face contorted with lust. His fiancée was in there. "Bah," he thought, "I'm tired of her." Until that evening he had thought there was no other woman in the world. She had brought back the feeling of youth, of clean living, of the fresh air, of purity that he had thought dead in him. And at dinner he had met the woman beside him. He had avoided his fiancée's eyes

during dinner. The other woman's eyes were always on his. She looked at him with clenched teeth when she raised her glass to her lips. The contour of her full figure, clothed in clinging black silk, brought a thick hot mist before his eyes. That mist shut out youth, purity, love, freshness, everything but passion. A glance, a nod, a whispered word and he was slinking with her through the orchard, without thought.

He looked down at her. Her face resting against his shoulder was turned to the sky. Her eyes were closed. He could hardly see her lips through the darkness. "Come on," he said, "farther." They moved through a gap in a hedge into a level field. They advanced towards a line of tall trees in front. "Over there," she panted, "under those trees." "All right," he mumbled. They walked in silence hurriedly. Their shoulders brushed as they sidestepped to avoid the tall thistles. She moved like a cat, her body twisting at the hips. He moved crouching. His dark face was scowling. His open lips stood red against his black clipped moustache.

Then the trees loomed up in front of them. Her right heel slipped on a hoof mark. She halted with a gasp and gripped her ankle. He swore silently at the delay and bent over her stooping body. His left hand moved over her bare neck, above the cape of

her wrap. He trembled at the touch of her soft flesh. "Are you hurt?" he said.

"It's nothing," she replied standing upright. Her right arm went about his waist. She pressed him to her. His left arm encircled her neck. They both trembled. She looked around eagerly from tree to tree. "There," she said pointing at the two farthest. They were about to move towards them in silence, when she gripped his coat lapel with her left hand. "Look," she said, "aren't they wonderful?" He looked fiercely at the two trees. "Curse the woman," he thought. He was not in a mood to pay attention to wonderful trees. And yet . . .

Suddenly the form of the two trees gripped his soul. Something rushed from every corner of his body, from his legs, stomach, head, hands and heart, to the centre of his chest and then straightforward to the trees. For a moment he was spellbound. Then his brain cleared. It seemed to make a noise like a screen being swept hurriedly from a window. He saw the two trees stand out against the background of blue sky, with darkness between him and the trees, and between the trees and the sky. He forgot they were trees. They appeared to be alive. The right tree was tall and slim. Its branches hung evenly on the trunk. They were wrapped around it, leafily, like a soft sinuous cloak. It was

hiding behind the cloak. The left tree was reaching out to it. The top of the trunk leaned forward eagerly. A forked branch, like a giant's hands, tried to grip it. The huge knots on its stem stood out like vast muscles, as if it were straining forward trying to embrace the other tree. And the other tree hid between its cloak. The left tree was unable to reach it. They appeared to him to have been struck dead in that position. By what? "By sin" flashed across his mind, and he shivered. The woman shivered too. But she shivered sensuously, making a hissing noise between her teeth. "Wonderful," she said in a voice whose sound suddenly repelled him like the hiss of an unclean reptile. "Like, like jasmine against, against . . ." She swallowed her breath and her hand crept up about his neck, softly like a cat's paw. Then she turned her face up to his. He looked down into it, his nostrils twitching. His eyes swept over her face. He saw the dark circles under her half-closed eyes. He saw her puffed neck moving flabbily. Then his eyes darted back to the trees. Their cold rigid bodies seemed to crack with strength, as the light breeze licked their trunks. Their pure beauty made him feel a lump in his throat. The woman shook him irritably. "Come," she said.

He gripped her shoulders suddenly and stared

into her eyes savagely. He shook with fury. His fingers dug into her flesh until she screamed. Then he flung her away from him and, holding his hands to his eyes, he staggered around groaning. Then he threw back his head and began to laugh wildly. He held his sides and laughed. The woman hissed out "you cur" and began to run towards the house. He started at the words and looked with wide open mouth after her. Her form was already indistinct. He could only hear the swish of her silk dress. Then his eyes smiled tenderly and sadly. He tiptoed up to the right tree. He put his arms around the dark dewy trunk. He kissed it. Then he rushed headlong back to his fiancée.

IX

The Blackbird

HE WAS STANDING ON THE TOP OF A STONE FENCE singing as loud as he could. He was trying to drown the harsh babble of the sparrows that were perched in the ivy that grew on the face of the tiny cliff behind him. On three sides the tiny cliff encircled him, making a green sloping grassy valley about him and in front of him. Beyond the valley stretched a wide plain.

With his beak in the air and his throat swelling with sound he poured out his voice over the valley. The shrill chirping of the sparrows grated on his ears as it came from behind him in a confused babble. But he rejoiced, for his own delicious warble re-echoed again and again, high above every other sound in the valley. When the echo of his voice came back to him, with its loudness silvered into an enchanting softness by the creviced cliffs, he became so drunk with pride that he swayed on his slender legs and made his wing feathers flutter. He shut his eyes and bent forward his beak again and again to sing with greater strength. It seemed to him that his throat would melt.

The sun had set. The blue twilight was darkening in the valley. It was time for him to be asleep. But

he sang on, drunk with pride. So intent was he on his song that he never noticed the sudden silence that fell on all the birds that had been singing, chirping and twittering behind him. Silence came suddenly except for the nervous, questioning, protracted whisper of a robin that hopped from stone to stone in the little rocky field beneath the cliff, thrusting out his breast defiantly with each hop. The ivy on the cliff face had been a moment ago alive with sound, and the ivy leaves had been shaking and fluttering as birds rushed hither and thither through them. Now the ivy was still. Not a bird moved. But the blackbird standing on the fence sang on.

A cat had entered the valley. He came over the brow of the little cliff, scrambled noiselessly down a crevice that was covered with moss and trotted swiftly along under the cliff until the birds stopped singing and chirping. As soon as their voices stopped the cat halted. He stopped dead with his right fore paw raised, his long black body half hidden in a hummock of grass he was passing through, his big eyes already gleaming in the half darkness. Then he began slowly to tip the grass around him with his snout as if he were going to eat it. He curled his tail up under him. He lay down slowly on his stomach, just for one moment, and then with a fierce flashing of his eyes, he took a short

rush forward close to the earth. He saw the blackbird singing on the fence that stretched across his path in front. The rush brought him as far as the fence where it ended in the cliff. Carefully planting paw after paw on the stones, and shaking each paw as he raised it to climb farther, he mounted the fence until he reached the top with his head. His large round whiskered head appeared over the top of the fence and began to roll around with an awful slowness. Again his eyes reached the blackbird singing on his right, ten yards in front of him. His eyes blinked and he made a little bored movement with his head from side to side as if he were heaving a sigh. He licked his paw. Then with a sudden and amazing spring he drew his body noiselessly to the top of the fence and rushed along it for five yards with his tail outstretched, his eyes blazing with an intense ferocity. The robin set up a piercing cry. The cat stopped dead.

The blackbird, conscious of the silence behind him, was full of vanity. He thought that he had overcome the sparrows and that they were listening in rapturous silence to his delicious warbling. He heard the robin shriek and he thought that the warning shriek was a cry of jealous rage. He shook himself and let all the feathers on his dun body sway with the light breeze that came up from the valley across his

round breast. Then pushing his head backwards until his neck was almost joined with his back he broke out into another peal. The cat began to smell the little patch of blackened moss that grew on a stone in front of him on the fence.

Then there was silence for several moments. The robin had suddenly taken fright and flew southwards into the darkness that seemed to hang in the distance. The blackbird was listening to the answering call of his own voice coming back to him. The cat crouched down very low with his head moving from side to side in an apologetic manner, the light breeze making little whitish ridges through the dark fur on his back. Then he moved forward again.

He moved forward just as the blackbird broke once more into song. His long black body, moving sinuously along the pointed grey stones, looked ghoulish. The rippling notes coming from the blackbird's full throat rose in a wild peal of joy as the cat stole nearer inch by inch until at last he was within striking distance. He measured the round dun body of the blackbird with his eyes, and he raised his right fore paw carefully to thrust it forward to a little round stone whence he intended to spring. His body shivered and then it stretched out. The right fore paw landed on the round stone and . . .

Just then a gust of wind struck the blackbird sideways and made him shiver. It was the first gust of the night wind. It filled him with cold and with the sudden realization that he was making a fool of himself singing out there in complete darkness when all the other birds were gone to bed. Suddenly he thought that the silence was on account of the darkness having fallen and not on account of his wonderful music. He was filled with disgust and, uttering three loud peals of bravado, he rose from the fence just as the cat plunged forward to grasp him. A claw landed in his tail and three little feathers fluttered behind as he flew away, his heart panting with fright, afraid to look behind him.

Behind him the cat lay at the foot of the fence, where he had fallen after his fruitless plunge. His head was turned sideways, he was half fallen on his haunches and he was growling savagely. The sparrows began to twitter in the ivy.

X

Selling Pigs

MRS. DERRANE WAS BANGING A SOD OF TURF vigorously on the hearthstone. The sod was very hard, and when at last it broke one piece flew up in the air, hit the pot-hooks that hung on the chimney hanger and then descended on the half-baked cake that lay in the griddle.

"My soul from the devil," said Mrs. Derrane angrily, picking it out of the griddle, "everything is upside down in this house. Poverty, poverty, poverty. Get out of that, you child of misfortune," she cried, hitting the black cat that lay curled in the ashes with the piece of turf.

The cat me-owed, darted to the dresser, and looked at her viciously while he licked his paw. Then he shook his paw and fled out of the door.

"Phew!" said Mrs. Derrane's husband, "we are in a temper this morning. Phew! You have a bad heart, my girl. By all the oaths in the Holy Book you have."

"Oh, you lazy lout of a man!" cried the woman, jumping to her feet and arranging her hair furiously. "It's a pity ye didn't find that out the day you married me. Troth it is. I wish to God it was on some other finger you put your threepenny-halfpenny ring!"

"Now, Mary – "

"Oh, hold yer tongue, Michael Derrane."

Mary bustled around the kitchen doing nothing, dusting the dresser, rattling the milk can, throwing clothes about, banging the shovel that stood at the back door. Then she went to the door and stood with her arms akimbo, looking out. She was a handsome young woman, black-haired, red-cheeked and with high cheek-bones. Her dark eyes were flashing like a young colt's. She wore a check apron over her red petticoat.

Her husband sat by the fire watching her and stroking his brown beard. Now and again he giggled, and his brown eyes sparkled with merriment. He, too, was handsome, and as he giggled his splendid muscles moved rhythmically beneath his blue sweater. Then he jumped to his feet and laughed. His wife took no notice of him, but kept looking out of the door, twitching her shoulders. "Mary, I say." Mary did not reply. He moved up to her, smiling, and put his arm about her waist. "Go away from me," she said, bending her head and at the same time turning around to him.

"Yerra, where can I go, Mary?" said Michael, crushing her to his bosom. "Amn't I tied to you for life; oh, pulse of my heart?"

Mary raised her lips to his and they kissed passionately. The smile faded from his face and he looked into hers tenderly.

"What's the trouble, my white love?" he said.

"Oh, come in from the door," said Mary coyly, "the whole village will see us, and we six months married. Oh, Michael!"

He lifted her in his arms and sat on the hearth stool with her in his lap.

"Was it about the pigs, Mary?"

"Yes," she gasped, fiddling with the breast of his jersey. "You know well I have nothing in the house, and I want to go to the mainland to buy a chair for the room and a warm blanket for the winter, and a stone of wool to make the frieze, and lots of things. And it's time to sell them, Michael. They say prices are going to fall next week."

"Well, well, now, and why didn't you tell me that? Sure I thought it was how you were getting tired of me."

They both laughed childishly. They were really a foolish couple and a disgrace to Inverara, where people never carry on like that after being married six months.

"Will ye sell them to-day, Michael?" murmured Mary, and her voice came up from somewhere in his chest.

"Yerra, I'd sell my soul to please you. Although they'd be in better condition in another month. But what the devil is the difference? Get up, you lazy girl, and boil the kettle. We better wash them right away. The jobber, I heard, is on his way over from Kilmurrage. Come on; move, lazybones!"

Michael, holding on to her apron-strings, began to caper around the kitchen.

"Let me go, you fool," laughed Mary, "how can I do anything while you are hanging on to me? Go on and fix the fire, while I strain the milk. Kiss me first."

They prepared a tub of hot water and went to the sty at the back of the cabin to wash the pigs. The sty was a little square hut covered with a sloping roof of zinc with a little square yard in front, floored with concrete and surrounded by a high double stone fence. As soon as they entered the yard, three pigs rushed out grunting, with their snouts in the air smelling. Mary emptied a pail of mashed potatoes and sour milk in the trough in the middle of the yard, and the pigs dived into it biting one another. Then she and her husband began to wash them with soapy water.

"They are three fine pigs, God bless them," said Michael.

"How much are you going to ask for them?" said Mary. The tender tone had left her voice now. It had a businesslike ring.

Michael scratched his beard.

"It would be a mortal sin to take a penny less than sixteen pounds."

"Say fifteen pounds ten, Michael. He'd never give more than that."

"I won't cross yer word, Mary. Fifteen pound ten it is."

They finished washing the pigs and came back to the cabin. Mary hurried about, sweeping the earthen floor and the hearth, polishing the dresser and tidying the pots that lay against the back door.

Suddenly Michael, who was standing at the door, looking out, said: "Hist, here he is up the road."

"Lord save us," said Mary. "You better go and have a look at the sheep. It's always best to pretend not to expect him. Stay away an hour." She bundled him out of the cabin hurriedly and then sat on a stool by the dresser, knitting.

Presently the pig-jobber came up the yard, shouting loudly to somebody, who was a long way off, about the weather. He walked very fast and with an air of being rushing around all the time, oppressed with business. He was a small man, with grey chin

whiskers, a crooked red nose, with a great red knob stuck between his two eyes, on account of a fall from a cliff. His left leg had been broken in the same fall, and it bent outwards in a semicircle as he walked.
"God save all here," he said, coming into the cabin.
"And you, too," said Mary. "Ye're welcome, Peter Mullen. Take a seat by the fire here. Well, now, and how's your family?"
"Splendid, Mrs. Derrane, and how's Michael?"
"Oh, sure there's no use complaining, but I'm glad to see ye."

The jobber sat by the hearth and began lighting his pipe while Mary bustled, filling the kettle with water. When the jobber saw her approaching the fire with it he expostulated.
"Now, Mary, don't offer me anything, I – "
"Oh, will ye hold yer whist; sure ye wouldn't think of leaving my house without tasting something, if it were only a mouthful of tea."
"Well, well, now," said the jobber with a laugh, "it is kind mother for you to be hospitable."

There was silence for a minute, while Mary began to lay the table.
"Where is Michael?" said the jobber, at length.
"Oh, he is out somewhere," said Mary casually.
"Ye didn't want him, did ye?"
"No-o," said the jobber, heaving a sigh. "I was just

passing, so I thought I might look at his slips of pigs. I might need a few shortly. Though your pigs are very young, I hear."

"Well, we aren't thinking of selling them for another month or so, but sure you can have a look at them. Or maybe ye'd rather wait for himself. He'll be in any minute."

The jobber tapped nervously with his stick, obviously anxious to get away, but Mary kept chattering unconcernedly about everything. The kettle boiled. The tea was made. The jobber supped his tea hurriedly and swallowed an egg and ate some griddle cake. Still there was no sign of Michael.

"I'm afraid I must be going," he said.

"Oh, sit down, man," said Mary, "he'll be in any minute. Sure it's not afraid you are that he'd think you were courting me."

They both laughed and the jobber sat down again, and Mary kept chattering, until at last Michael, who had been sitting in a neighbouring cottage, came in.

"Ha, my soul from the devil!" he cried, "I'm glad to see you, Peter Mullen."

"I thought I'd see how your slips of pigs are getting on," said the jobber.

"Slips d'ye call them, Peter?" cried Michael. "I'll lay my oath there aren't three better pigs in the

island. But I'm not selling them yet, for all that. But sure ye can have a look at them."

The three of them went out to the pigsty and entered the yard. The pigs were lying on their sides in the sun. They grunted, but did not rise. The jobber beat them with his stick and they struggled to their feet.

"They're not bad slips, God bless them," said the jobber. He walked around them several times. Then he measured the girth of each with his arms. Then he felt their hips, their flanks, their ears, pulled their tails, and laid his stick along their backs measuring them. Then he stood with his arms folded, looking at the ground.

"Well," said Michael, "what do you think of them?"

The jobber shook his head, took his pipe from his pocket and stuck his finger down the bowl. Then he tapped the ground three times with his stick and then leaned on it.

It was a habit he had.

"There is no fall to their flank," he said.

"No fall to their flank!" cried Michael, curling his nether lip outwards and wrinkling his forehead. "Why, where did you ever see a flank like that? And look at their thighs. Why, man, you could take shelter on a rainy day under their thighs. Look at that clear skin. Did you ever see an ear like that, as

transparent as running water. There's a snout for you, as well moulded as a blood mare's nostrils. Why, man, they are – "

"Now don't be talking," interrupted the jobber. "A pig is a pig and weight is weight. Where is their weight, will ye tell me?"

"Is it their weight that's troubling ye? Well, now, I am surprised that a knowledgeable man like yerself would talk that way. Sure ye're not thinking that a sloppy, grease-swilling pig would weigh as heavy as a tight, well-balanced pig that's fed with the hand on the cleanest sour milk and the best of potatoes and the best bran that could be bought for money. Listen to what I'm going to tell ye. There isn't a loose inch in one of them three pigs Their flesh is so packed that you couldn't drive a spear through it. What man? Is it out of your senses you are?"

"Oh, hold yer whist, will ye, Michael Derrane," said the jobber, moving out towards the door of the yard. "Don't try to tell me anything about a pig." He rushed back and hit one of the pigs on the hind hoof with his stick. "D'ye see that hoof?" he cried. "But ye're young yet. Ye're young, and ye have a lot to learn."

"What's the matter with that hoof?" cried Michael and Mary together.

"That's the surest sign of a pig's weight," said the

jobber, leaning learnedly on his stick with his crooked leg thrust out. "If a hoof is not spread, there is no weight in the pig."

"Arrah, go away with ye," said Michael.

"If he doesn't like them, why doesn't he leave them?" cried Mary. "I hope ye're not thinking of selling them, Michael. Take care, would you. The bran will last another month."

"Listen here," said Michael, striking his right fist into his left palm, "listen here."

"Now, wait a minute," said the jobber, seizing his beard in his hand and looking at Michael, "I am a man of one word. Is fifteen pounds the price of the pigs as they stand or is it not?"

"It isn't," said Michael shortly. "I wouldn't sell them for a penny less than sixteen pounds, if I were so long without bread that I'd mistake a dogfish for a wheaten loaf."

"Well, now, that settles it," said the jobber, spitting on the crutch of his stick and setting off out of the yard in an awful hurry.

Mary and Michael followed him out of the yard, and as they were shutting the door May whispered to Michael: "Don't let him go." Michael looked at her and smiled. The jobber paused half-way down the yard and turned about.

"I'm telling ye, Michael Derrane," he said, "you'll

be sorry to turn down my offer. There isn't another jobber in the county will give ye within one pound of the money a week from to-day. And yer pigs show no signs that they are going to improve."

"There is nothing in that but fool's talk," Michael called out. "Why not be a man and give the sixteen pounds?"

The jobber walked back hurriedly. He spat on his right hand and held it out to Michael.

"Are ye going to break a gentleman's word?" he said loudly. "Say fifteen pounds – "

Michael turned away from the outstretched hand and shook his head. The jobber waved his stick and turned to Mary.

"My good woman," he said, "I have done my best, what more can I do? Although I would hate to think I would leave your mother's daughter's house without buying them."

"Oh, wait now," said Mary, smiling coquettishly, "sure, as the men can't arrange the bargain, maybe a woman could step in and settle the difference. Don't go back on a woman's word and split the difference."

"Spoken like a woman," cried the jobber, stamping on the ground with his foot. "I was never a man to go against a word from the lips of a beautiful woman. Split it is as far as I am concerned. Are you satisfied, Michael?"

"Put it there," cried Michael, holding out his hand. "The bargain is made. Fifteen pound ten it is."

The three of them went into the pigsty again and the jobber put his mark on the pigs' backs with his scissors. Then he hurried away waving his stick, glad he had got the pigs for ten shillings less than he had intended to give. Michael and Mary entered the cabin.

"Oh, Michael," said Mary, "now we can go to town on Thursday and I'll get everything we want and we'll have a great time, won't we? Now what's the matter, Michael? What is it you're thinking about?"

Michael was looking at the ground with his hands behind his back. He was scowling at the floor.

"It's nothing," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "I was wondering whether Peter Mullen would have given another ten shillings if I had held out a little longer. I'd hate to have it said that he bested me. But, sure, the ten shillings won't matter, Mary. Give me ten kisses instead."

XI

Blood Lust

THE IDEA CAME IN A FLASH. ONE MOMENT HE WAS looking into the green sea thoughtlessly, as it swung past the anchored boat, and the next moment he wanted to kill his brother. The idea entered at the top of his head, where the hot sun played on his skull and it came straight down into the centre of his brain.

There it stayed and a red spot came before his eyes. The birthmark that ran across his upper lip twitched and his nostrils expanded. He looked at his brother, who sat with his back to him in the stern of the boat.

Staring stupidly at his brother's back he tried to think, but he failed to think. Thinking was difficult. His conciousness was dead except for the red spot in front of his eyes and the idea transfixed in the centre of his brain, standing immovable, saying: "Kill your brother." He put his hand to the top of his skull where the idea had entered and rubbed it and then caught the two fishing lines, that hung one on each side of the boat, and letting his lower lip hang, tried not to be conscious of the red spot and the idea.

But his hands soon left the lines, refusing to obey the weak command of his will. They came back to

his chest and crossed on it and then pressed tightly into his armpits, and he dimly became aware that they were cleansing themselves of the brine and the fish slime that had gathered on them. He found himself looking at them – two great rough hands, each finger hanging stiffly from the joints and a great black, half-healed scar across the back of the right hand. Then he found himself looking from the hands to his brother's back, then up along the back to his brother's neck. When the red spot became fixed on his brother's neck, he found his lips curling up sideways towards his left ear and his eyebrows strained up towards his forehead. He felt himself drawing in his breath through his nostrils and snarling slowly. A nerve in the left side of his neck twitched. His hands clenched and a trembling shiver went upwards from his hands along the wrists to the shoulders and then all through the body, until it was rigid. He hung there on the seat waiting without breathing.

Then the idea standing in the centre of his brain began to ferment. It began to talk. It said: "Your brother has a beautiful body. You have a birthmark on your upper lip and your left leg is shorter than the right. You are ugly. No woman will look at you. Your brother gets everything good in life. Kill him." And the idea laughed within him.

Placing his hands on either side of him on the seat, he attempted to rise to go to his brother, but he paused. A cunning look came into his eyes. He looked around. Behind him lay the open sea, rising and falling smoothly. In front of him rose the towering cliffs. There was nobody in sight. Even the sea birds were asleep on their perches in the cliffs. There was perfect silence. He listened to the silence excitedly. Then the idea surged again forward, striking against the wall of his forehead.

He placed his right foot in front of him to move and it hit the basket that lay in the centre of the boat. The basket irritated him. It prevented him from going forward directly and clasping his brother's neck with his great hands. He looked at it snarling and frowning. His eyes were two points. The basket confused him. He could not explain its presence. Its removal was a physical act that might shatter that idea. He looked at it stupidly for a moment or two. Then he saw the long knife stuck in the corner of it. He smiled and reached out for it, at the same time looking cunningly at his brother. His right hand went about the handle of the knife. He gripped it and pulled it out. Then he started. His brother had moved. He yawned, stretched his arms and then lay idly on his lines again.

Again the idea fermented. It began to circle around

his brain, hurting the centre of his skull. At last it stopped again, pushing against the rear wall of his forehead. He drew in his breath deeply and paused that way, with his chest expanded. His lower lip began to tremble. His right knee began to tremble. Then the trembling spread all over his body. He felt a desire to yell, but he repressed the desire. The hand holding the knife began to move. He tried to hold it back, but it strained forward. The muscles gripped the handle like a vice. His arm stiffened to the shoulder and his whole body leaned forward following the hand holding the knife. His right foot circled the basket cautiously. He lay, his left hand on the gunwale of the boat and, balancing his body, he prepared to cross the basket. He stood there astride the basket with the sharp teeth of the dried willows hurting the juncture of his loins. He made an effort to go forward and failed. Just when he tried to plunge forward his muscles refused to act. Another idea struck him at that moment, disconcerting him. Fear came and hit him in the chest, making his breathing hard. Then it went from his chest up into his brain, assaulting the other idea. The two ideas struggled for a moment, and then fear gained the mastery. He withdrew his leg and fell in a heap on the seat.

Then fear fled and the other idea became again pre-

dominant. His hand shot forward once more and stiffened. He decided to go forward from the seat to his brother's back in one rush. He drew back and fixed his gaze on the hollow beneath his brother's shoulder blade, just beneath the bulge where the bone stuck out against the shirt. The red point had now fixed on that spot. He contorted his face into a savage snarl. He shut the left eye until his cheekbone hurt him. He drew his right hand holding the knife backwards, to the full reach of his shoulder joint.

Then suddenly the fishing line to the left twanged and went taut. He dropped the knife, and seizing the line hauled it in. Presently a glittering, gasping fish landed in the bottom of the boat. He placed it between his knees and crushed, crushed, until it was a pulped shapeless mass. He dug his thumbs in through the eye sockets. Then he sighed. His blood lust was satisfied.

XII

His First Flight

THE YOUNG SEAGULL WAS ALONE ON HIS LEDGE. His two brothers and his sister had already flown away the day before. He had been afraid to fly with them. Somehow when he had taken a little run forward to the brink of the ledge and attempted to flap his wings he became afraid. The great expanse of sea stretched down beneath, and it was such a long way down – miles down. He felt certain that his wings would never support him, so he bent his head and ran away back to the little hole under the ledge where he slept at night. Even when each of his brothers and his little sister, whose wings were far shorter than his own, ran to the brink, flapped their wings, and flew away he failed to muster up courage to take that plunge which appeared to him so desperate. His father and mother had come around calling to him shrilly, upbraiding him, threatening to let him starve on his ledge unless he flew away. But for the life of him he could not move.

That was twenty-four hours ago. Since then nobody had come near him. The day before, all day long, he had watched his parents flying about with his brothers and sister, perfecting them in the art of flight, teaching them how to skim the waves and

how to dive for fish. He had, in fact, seen his older brother catch his first herring and devour it, standing on a rock, while his parents circled around raising a proud cackle. And all the morning the whole family had walked about on the big plateau midway down the opposite cliff, taunting him with his cowardice.

The sun was now ascending the sky, blazing warmly on his ledge that faced the south. He felt the heat because he had not eaten since the previous nightfall. Then he had found a dried piece of mackerel's tail at the far end of his ledge. Now there was not a single scrap of food left. He had searched every inch, rooting among the rough, dirt-caked straw nest where he and his brothers and sister had been hatched. He even gnawed at the dried pieces of spotted eggshell. It was like eating part of himself. He had then trotted back and forth from one end of the ledge to the other, his grey body the colour of the cliff, his long grey legs stepping daintily, trying to find some means of reaching his parents without having to fly. But on each side of him the ledge ended in a sheer fall of precipice, with the sea beneath. And between him and his parents there was a deep, wide chasm. Surely he could reach them without flying if he could only move northwards along the cliff face? But then on what

could he walk? There was no ledge, and he was not a fly. And above him he could see nothing. The precipice was sheer, and the top of it was perhaps farther away than the sea beneath him.

He stepped slowly out to the brink of the ledge, and, standing on one leg with the other leg hidden under his wing, he closed one eye, then the other, and pretended to be falling asleep. Still they took no notice of him. He saw his two brothers and his sister lying on the plateau dozing, with their heads sunk into their necks. His father was preening the feathers on his white back. Only his mother was looking at him. She was standing on a little high hump on the plateau, her white breast thrust forward. Now and again she tore at a piece of fish that lay at her feet, and then scraped each side of her beak on the rock. The sight of the food maddened him. How he loved to tear food that way, scraping his beak now and again to whet it! He uttered a low cackle. His mother cackled too, and looked over at him.

"Ga, ga, ga," he cried, begging her to bring him over some food. "Gaw-ool-ah," she screamed back derisively. But he kept calling plaintively, and after a minute or so he uttered a joyful scream. His mother had picked up a piece of the fish and was flying across to him with it. He leaned out eagerly,

tapping the rock with his feet, trying to get nearer to her as she flew across. But when she was just opposite to him, abreast of the ledge, she halted, her legs hanging limp, her wings motionless, the piece of fish in her beak almost within reach of his beak. He waited a moment in surprise, wondering why she did not come nearer, and then, maddened by hunger, he dived at the fish. With a loud scream he fell outwards and downwards into space. His mother had swooped upwards. As he passed beneath her he heard the swish of her wings. Then a monstrous terror seized him and his heart stood still. He could hear nothing. But it only lasted a moment. The next moment he felt his wings spread outwards. The wind rushed against his breast feathers, then under his stomach and against his wings. He could feel the tips of his wings cutting through the air. He was not falling headlong now. He was soaring gradually downwards and outwards. He was no longer afraid. He just felt a bit dizzy. Then he flapped his wings once and he soared upwards. He uttered a joyous scream and flapped them again. He soared higher. He raised his breast and banked against the wind. "Ga, ga, ga. Ga, ga, ga. Gaw-ool-ah." His mother swooped past him, her wings making a loud noise. He answered her with another scream. Then his father flew over him screaming. Then he saw his

two brothers and his sister flying around him, curveting and banking and soaring and diving.

Then he completely forgot that he had not always been able to fly, and commenced himself to dive and soar and curvet, shrieking shrilly.

He was near the sea now, flying straight over it, facing straight out over the ocean. He saw a vast green sea beneath him, with little ridges moving over it, and he turned his beak sideways and crowed amusedly. His parents and his brothers and sister had landed on this green floor in front of him. They were beckoning to him, calling shrilly. He dropped his legs to stand on the green sea. His legs sank into it. He screamed with fright and attempted to rise again, flapping his wings. But he was tired and weak with hunger and he could not rise, exhausted by the strange exercise. His feet sank into the green sea, and then his belly touched it and he sank no farther. He was floating on it. And around him his family was screaming, praising him, and their beaks were offering him scraps of dog-fish.

He had made his first flight.

XIII

A Shilling

THREE OLD MEN WERE SITTING ON THE SLASH WALL of Kilmillick Pier with their backs to the sea and their faces to the village and the sun. A light breeze came from the sea behind them, bringing a sweet salt smell of seaweed being kissed by the sun. The village in front was very quiet. Not a movement but the lazy blue smoke curling slantwise from the cabin chimneys. It was early afternoon, Sunday, and all the young men and women were in Kilmurrage at a football match. The three old men were telling stories of big fish they had caught in their youth.

Suddenly there was a swish of canvas and a little white yacht swung around the corner of the pier and came alongside. The three old men immediately got to their feet and advanced through the turf dust to the brink of the pier looking down at the yacht. Patsy Conroy the most active of the old men seized the mooring rope and made the yacht fast. Then he came back and joined the other two watching the yachtsmen getting ready to go ashore. "She's a lovely boat," said old Brian Manion, the old fellow with the bandy right leg and the bunion behind his right ear. "Heh," he said scratching the

small of his back, "it must cost a lot of money to keep that boat. Look at those shiny brasses and ye can see a carpet laid on the cabin floor through that hatchway. Oh boys!"

"I'd like to have her for a week's fishing," said Mick Feeney, breathing loudly through his long red nose. His big red-rimmed blue eyes seemed to jump in and out. He gripped the top of his stick with his two hands and looked down at the yacht with his short legs wide apart.

Patsy Conroy said nothing. He stood a little apart with his hands stuck in his waist-belt. Although he was seventy-two, he was straight, lithe and active, but his face was yellow and wrinkled like old parchment and his toothless red gums were bared in an old man's grin. His little eyes beneath his bushy white eyebrows roamed around the yacht cunningly as if they were trying to steal something. He wore a yellow muffler wound round and round his neck up to his chin, in spite of the heat of the day.

"Where is the nearest public-house?" drawled a red-faced man in a white linen shirt and trousers from the yacht deck.

The old men told him, all together.

"Let's go and have a drink, Totty," said the red-faced man.

"Right-o," said the other man.

A SHILLING

When the red-faced man was climbing the iron ladder on to the pier a shilling fell out of his hip pocket. It fell noiselessly on a little coil of rope that lay on the deck at the foot of the ladder. The red-faced man did not notice it and he walked up the pier with his friend. The three old men noticed it, but they did not tell the red-faced man. Neither did they tell one another. As soon as the shilling landed on the little coil of rope and lay there glistening, the three of them became so painfully conscious of it that they were bereft of the power of speech or of coherent thought. Each cast a glance at the shilling, a hurried furtive glance, and then each looked elsewhere, just after the manner of a dog that sees a rabbit in a bush and stops dead with one paw raised, seeing the rabbit although his eyes are fixed elsewhere.

Each old man knew that the other two had seen the shilling, yet each was silent about it in the hope of keeping the discovery his own secret. Each knew that it was impossible for him to go down the iron ladder to the deck, pick up the shilling and ascend with it to the pier without being detected. For there was a man who wore a round white cap doing something in the cabin. Every third moment or so his cap appeared through the hatchway and there was a noise of crockery being washed or something.

And the shilling was within two feet of the hatchway. And the old men, except perhaps Patsy Conroy, were too old to descend the ladder and ascend again. And anyway each knew that even if there were nobody in the cabin, and even if they could descend the ladder, that the others would prevent either one from getting the shilling, since each preferred that no one should have the shilling if he couldn't have it himself. And yet such was the lure of that glistening shilling that the three of them stared with palpitating hearts and feverishly working brains at objects within two feet of the shilling. They stared in a painful silence that was loud with sound as of a violent and quarrelsome conversation. The noise Mick Feeney made breathing through his nose exposed his whole scheme of thought to the other two men just as plainly as if he explained it slowly and in detail. Brian Manion kept fidgeting with his hands, rubbing the palms together, and the other two heard him and cursed his avarice. Patsy Conroy alone made no sound, but his very silence was loud and stinking to the other two men, for it left them in ignorance of what plans were passing through his crafty head.

And the sun shone warmly. And the salt, healthy smell of the sea inspired thirst. And there was excellent cool frothy porter in Kelly's. So much so

that no one of the three old men ever thought of the fact that the shilling belonged to somebody else. So much so indeed that each of them felt indignant with the shameless avarice of the other two. There was almost a homicidal tendency in the mind of each against the others. Thus three minutes passed. The two owners of the yacht had passed out of sight. Brian Manion and Mick Feeney were trembling and drivelling slightly at the mouth.

Then Patsy Conroy stooped and picked up a pebble from the pier. He dropped it on to the deck of the yacht. The other two men made a slight movement to intercept the pebble with their sticks, a foolish unconscious movement. Then they started and let their jaws drop. Patsy Conroy was speaking. "Hey there," he shouted between his cupped hands.

A pale-faced gloomy man with a napkin on his hip stepped up to the second step of the hatchway. "What d'ye want?" he said.

"Beg yer pardon, sir," said Patsy Conroy, "but would ye hand me up that shilling that just dropped out a' me hand?"

The man nodded, picked up the shilling, muttered "catch" and threw the shilling on to the pier. Patsy touched his cap and dived for it. The other two old men were so dumbfounded that they didn't even scramble for it. They watched Patsy spit on it and

put it in his pocket. They watched him walk up the pier, sniffing out loud, his long, lean, grey-backed figure with the yellow muffler around his neck, moving as straight and solemn as a policeman.

Then they looked at each other, their faces contorted with anger. And each, with upraised stick, snarled at the other:

"Why didn't ye stop him, you fool?"

XIV

Three Lambs

LITTLE MICHAEL ROSE BEFORE DAWN. HE TRIED TO make as little noise as possible He ate two slices of bread and butter and drank a cup of milk, although he hated cold milk with bread and butter in the morning. But on an occasion like this, what did it matter what a boy ate? He was going out to watch the black sheep having a lamb. His father had mentioned the night before that the black sheep was sure to lamb that morning, and of course there was a prize, three pancakes, for the first one who saw the lamb.

He lifted the latch gently and stole out. It was best not to let his brother John know he was going. He would be sure to want to come too. As he ran down the lane, his sleeves, brushing against the evergreen bushes, were wetted by the dew, and the tip of his cap was just visible above the hedge, bobbing up and down as he ran. He was in too great a hurry to open the gate and tore a little hole in the breast of his blue jersey climbing over it. But he didn't mind that. He would get another one on his thirteenth birthday.

He turned to the left from the main road, up a lane that led to the field where his father, the magistrate,

kept his prize sheep. It was only a quarter of a mile, that lane, but he thought that it would never end and he kept tripping among the stones that strewed the road. It was so awkward to run on the stones wearing shoes, and it was too early in the year yet to be allowed to go barefooted. He envied Little Jimmy, the son of the farm labourer, who was allowed to go barefooted all the year round, even in the depths of winter, and who always had such wonderful cuts on his big toes, the envy of all the little boys in the village school.

He climbed over the fence leading into the fields and, clapping his hands together, said, "Oh, you devil," a swear word he had learned from Little Jimmy and of which he was very proud. He took off his shoes and stockings and hid them in a hole in the fence. Then he ran jumping, his bare heels looking like round brown spots as he tossed them up behind him. The grass was wet and the ground was hard, but he persuaded himself that it was great fun.

Going through a gap into the next field, he saw a rabbit nibbling grass. He halted suddenly, his heart beating loudly. Pity he hadn't a dog. The rabbit stopped eating. He cocked up his ears. He stood on his tail, with his neck craned up and his fore feet hanging limp. Then he came down again. He thrust his ears forward. Then he lay flat with his

ears buried in his back and lay still. With a great yell Little Michael darted forward imitating a dog barking and the rabbit scurried away in short sharp leaps. Only his white tail was visible in the grey light.

Little Michael went into the next field, but the sheep were nowhere to be seen. He stood on a hillock and called out "Chowin, chowin," three times. Then he heard "Mah-m-m-m" in the next field and ran on. The sheep were in the last two fields, two oblong little fields, running in a hollow between two crags, surrounded by high thick fences, the walls of an old fort. In the nearest of the two fields he found ten of the sheep, standing side by side, looking at him, with their fifteen lambs in front of them also looking at him curiously. He counted them out loud and then he saw that the black sheep was not there. He panted with excitement. Perhaps she already had a lamb in the next field. He hurried to the gap leading into the next field, walking stealthily, avoiding the spots where the grass was high, so as to make less noise. It was bad to disturb a sheep that was lambing. He peered through a hole in the fence and could see nothing. Then he crawled to the gap and peered around the corner. The black sheep was just inside standing with her fore feet on a little mound.

Her belly was swollen out until it ended on each side in a sharp point and her legs appeared to be incapable of supporting her body. She turned her head sharply and listened. Little Michael held his breath, afraid to make a noise. It was of vital importance not to disturb the sheep. Straining back to lie down he burst a button on his trousers and he knew his braces were undone. He said, "Oh, you devil," again and decided to ask his mother to let him wear a belt instead of a braces, same as Little Jimmy wore. Then he crawled farther back from the gap and taking off his braces altogether made it into a belt. It hurt his hips, but he felt far better and manly.

Then he came back again to the gap and looked. The black sheep was still in the same place. She was scratching the earth with her fore feet and going around in a circle, as if she wanted to lie down but was afraid to lie down. Sometimes she ground her teeth and made an awful noise, baring her jaws and turning her head around sideways. Little Michael felt a pain in his heart in pity for her, and he wondered why the other sheep didn't come to keep her company. Then he wondered whether his mother had felt the same pain when she had Ethna the autumn before. She must have, because the doctor was there.

Suddenly the black sheep went on her knees. She stayed a few seconds on her knees and then she moaned and sank to the ground and stretched herself out with her neck on the little hillock and her hind quarters falling down the little slope. Little Michael forgot about the pain now. His heart thumped with excitement. He forgot to breathe, looking intently. "Ah," he said. The sheep stretched again and struggled to her feet and circled around once stamping and grinding her teeth. Little Michael moved up to her slowly. She looked at him anxiously, but she was too sick to move away. He broke the bladder and he saw two little feet sticking out. He seized them carefully and pulled. The sheep moaned again and pressed with all her might. The lamb dropped on the grass.

Little Michael sighed with delight and began to rub its body with his finger nails furiously. The sheep turned around and smelt it, making a funny happy noise in its throat. The lamb, its white body covered with yellow slime, began to move, and presently it tried to stand up, but it fell again and Little Michael kept rubbing it, sticking his fingers into its ears and nostrils to clear them. He was so intent on this work that he did not notice the sheep had moved away again, and it was only when the lamb was able to stand up and he wanted to give it suck,

that he noticed the sheep was lying again giving birth to another lamb. "Oh, you devil," gasped Little Michael, "six pancakes."

The second lamb was white like the first but with a black spot on its right ear. Little Michael rubbed it vigorously, pausing now and again to help the first lamb to its feet as it tried to stagger about. The sheep circled around making low noises in her throat, putting her nostrils to each lamb in turn, stopping nowhere, as giddy as a young schoolgirl, while the hard pellets of earth that stuck to her belly jingled like beads when she moved. Little Michael then took the first lamb and tried to put it to suck, but it refused to take the teat, stupidly sticking its mouth into the wool. Then he put his finger in its mouth and gradually got the teat in with his other hand. Then he pressed the teat and the hot milk squirted into the lamb's mouth. The lamb shook its tail, shrugged its body, made a little drive with its head and began to suck.

Little Michael was just going to give the second lamb suck, when the sheep moaned and moved away again. He said "chowin, chowin, poor chowin," and put the lamb to her head, but she turned away moaning and grinding her teeth and stamping. "Oh, you devil," said Little Michael, "she is going to have another lamb."

The sheep lay down again, with her fore leg stretched out in front of her and, straining her neck backwards, gave birth to a third lamb, a black lamb.

Then she rose smartly to her feet, her two sides hollow now. She shrugged herself violently and, without noticing the lambs, started to eat grass fiercely, just pausing now and again to say "mah-m-m-m."

Little Michael, in an ecstasy of delight, rubbed the black lamb until it was able to stand. Then he put all the lambs to suck, the sheep eating around her in a circle, without changing her feet, smelling a lamb now and again. "Oh, you devil," Little Michael kept saying, thinking he would be quite famous now, and talked about for a whole week. It was not every day that a sheep had three lambs.

He brought them to a sheltered spot under the fence. He wiped the birth slime from his hands with some grass. He opened his penknife and cut the dirty wool from the sheep's udder, lest the lambs might swallow some and die. Then he gave a final look at them, said, "Chowin, chowin," tenderly and turned to go.

He was already at the gap when he stopped with a start. He raced back to the lambs and examined each of them. "Three she lambs," he gasped. "Oh,

you devil, that never happened before. Maybe father will give me half-a-crown."

And as he raced homeward, he barked like a dog in his delight.

XV

A Pig in a Bedroom

THE SANITARY OFFICER WAS COMING DOWN THE main street of Kilmurrage at a sharp trot. He was coming from the post office with the mail, and letters and newspapers were sticking from the pockets of his threadbare grey tweed suit. His boots scratched along the road as he ran, and he kept cursing to himself and pulling at his stiff linen collar with his hand, so that there was a black smudge under his right ear. Now and again he stopped to take out his large silver watch and look at it. Then he put it back, scratched the back of his head and looked at the letter that he held in his right hand. "Damn and blast this letter," he would say, and trot on again. He was a thin, pale-faced man of middle age, and a very common-looking man except for his shifty blue eyes and the funny way he had of sniffing and twisting the end of his long sharp nose from side to side when he sniffed.

As he was going to turn to the right by the courthouse towards his own house, a peasant jumped off a gate and hailed him. "Mr. Milligan," said the peasant, wiping his mouth on his sleeve, "it's how my wife is sick and I want a red ticket for the doctor." The sanitary officer waved his hands in the

air and began to swear and stammer. "Uh-uh-uh!" he cried, "I'm relieving officer, sanitary officer, the devil's officer, and God knows what. You and your wife can go to the devil, d'you hear? What do you take me for?" And he ran on. After a few yards he turned around and said, "Go down to the house, you fool, and I'll give you a ticket."

The front of his house was crowded with people, standing about and talking; they were tourists come to Inverara for the day and were waiting for their lunch, for Milligan's wife kept an hotel. Milligan scowled at the tourists and at the table set for lunch which he saw through the dining-room window as he passed. "I'll have to wait for MY chuck until all these ragamuffins are gone," he growled. He went through a little green wooden gate and a flagged alley-way into the garden. His wife forbade him to enter by the front door "when there are strangers about, you with your scowl and your dirt that's enough to drive the devil away." It was humiliating not to be allowed to enter by his own front door, so he vented his anger on a hen that was rooting among the cabbage patch and chased her around until he was breathless. His terrier dog chained to the tool-shed began to bark and scratch the ground, so Milligan made a kick at him, missed and fell on his back. He got up and was rushing at the dog again

when he thought of the letter in his hand and he went towards the kitchen door at a run.

"Letter for you, Mary," he said putting his head and right foot into the kitchen and searching in his pockets for the letter, but nobody took any notice of him. The kitchen was in an uproar. Mrs. Milligan and her two servants were rushing about preparing lunch for twelve visitors. The kitchen was very large and yet there seemed to be no room, for the three women were continually getting into one another's way, going from the range to the large deal table in the centre of the room and to the dressers and the side table where meat, vegetables and pastries were lying about ready to be cooked. The kitchen was very hot. The air smelt strongly of roast mutton and boiling cabbage. Everybody was dripping with perspiration. It was one of the warmest days that summer.

"Here's your letter," said Milligan. "Dublin postmark. I suppose it's from that bloomin' lawyer that's coming down for a week. See what he says, Mary." Milligan put the letter on a sewing machine by the door and stood by it, looking at it curiously and scratching his hip.

"The devil take you and the letter," cried Milligan's wife, rushing at him from the side table, her hands covered with dough, and her perspiring face as red

as a beetroot. She was all in white and she was spotlessly clean and there was not a single portion of her body that was not pointed and angular, nothing out of place, nothing soft, nothing round, neither a loose tress of hair, nor a bit of pink ribbon showing at the neck of her blouse. Even all her teeth were white and perfect and she had the jaw of a prize-fighter. Milligan stopped scratching his hip and opened his mouth.

"You lazy lout of a man," cried Mrs. Milligan in a voice so loud and harsh that a skinny-faced lady tourist sitting on the garden seat outside the front door jumped up and said, "Oh, my dear, what a voice!" The two servant girls standing by the range looked at one another and tittered. "Get out of my sight," continued Mrs. Milligan, "here I am wearing my bones out working and you are running around with your letters. Jack of all trades indeed, and the few mangy pounds you earn in the year are not enough to keep you in food. And here you come worrying me with your letters."

"But that letter is yours, Mary."

"Go away. Get out. Clear out," and she stamped and her lips quivered. Milligan sighed and trotted towards a black door to the right of the range into his office. As he passed the servant girls, he shook his fist at them and said, "What the hell are ye

laughing at, you fools?" Then he banged the door behind him. Mrs. Milligan shouted at the door for a few moments and then turned on the servants and knocked their heads together vigorously. "You idle wretches," she cried. "You Mary Cassidy, you slattern, have you no shame left? You were thrown out of your last job for stealing a blanket, and I took ye in here because I am too soft-hearted and ye go fiddling about. Kitty Hernon, I tell ye if ye don't straighten that ugly face of yours and put those potatoes on the fire, I'll . . . I'll flay ye alive so that yer old beershark of a mother won't recognize ye."

"Oh boys, oh boys," murmured Milligan, listening at the keyhole. "Now they're getting it, bad luck to them." He giggled as if he were enjoying a great joke and walked over to his little table, with the dirty linoleum cloth on it and papers and letters strewn about on it.

"Now how the blazes am I to write out this report and send it in to-day?" he cried, banging the letter he held in his hand on the table. "All on account of a bloomin' man that kept a pig in his bedroom. Well I'll be jiggered. But it must be done." He sat down, got a sheet of paper, took up a pen and began to bite the end: "That bloomin' Board o' Guardians is the limit. Eh? Charley Finnigan has his knife in me. That's well known. I wish *I* were a clerk and

I'd settle a lot o' them. Anyhow, let's write this bloomin' report. I'll get the sack unless I send it in to-day. It's the third warning." He began to write when a fresh uproar started in the kitchen, and the peasant who had asked for a red ticket rushed into the office with his hat in his hand.

"Murdher alive!" he cried, shutting the door and panting.

"Now what the – " began Milligan, jumping up.

"It's yer wife," said the peasant, grinning and showing two rows of black teeth, "be God, she flew at me fer nothin' at all."

"Now what d'ye want?" cried Milligan, becoming arrogant and sticking out his chin. The peasant began to shuffle and said:

"It's how my wife is sick, and the doctor, ye see, well, ye see, I told him about her, and the parish priest, I met him up the road, ye see, an' he said – "

"Man alive, are ye out of your mind? Say what ye want, man. What is it?"

"Well, ye see – "

"Hello, Mrs. Milligan, dinner ready yet?" came a loud, hearty voice from the kitchen. "Where's Joe?"

"Hellow, Mr. Corbett! Isn't it hot?" came Mrs. Milligan's voice affably. "It'll be ready in a quarter of an hour. It's *so* hot. Joe is in the office. Joe, Mr.

Corbett wants to see ye. Mind that saucepan, Kitty."

"All right, I just want to show him this paper," said Corbett with a hoarse gurgle, opening the black door. "Hellow, Joe."

"Hellow, Mr. Corbett," said Milligan rubbing his hands, "take a seat. What news?"

Corbett's face was so fat that he had almost to turn his lips inside out in order to break into a laugh, and when he laughed his whole body and everything on it shook, his gold watch chain, his loose brown tweed coat, his loose navy blue trousers with the grease stain on the left knee. Even his Panama hat shook. Everything shook but his tennis shirt, and the shirt strained at his throat. He laughed and crushed the newspaper against his side. The peasant opened his mouth wide and laughed too for some reason or other. Milligan began to laugh loudest of all, but he only laughed with his mouth. In his mind he was thinking, "It's all very well for Corbett to laugh. He is a retired pig-jobber with a comfortable income, and he has nothing else to do. And he gets more respect in my own house than I get myself, and he only pays thirty bob a week for his board and lodging. I wonder has my wife anything to do with him."

"Look at this," roared Corbett, flattening out the

newspaper on the table and leaning over it, panting.

The newspaper was the local weekly and there was an amusing paragraph about a cow that was stolen three times and sold three times at the same fair. Milligan did not think it amusing, but he laughed loudly and said, "Well, I'll be damned," several times. He found great difficulty in laughing and it made him very miserable and enraged with the peasant, who was bursting his sides laughing.

"There is that lout," thought Milligan, "his wife is sick and he is laughing. Whatever this blasted fool Corbett means by coming in here disturbing me for no reason at all, I don't know. . . . I'll never get that report done." And he kept on laughing.

Then Corbett suddenly stopped laughing and said in a whisper, "What d'ye think I heard – ?" He paused and glanced at the peasant. "Come out in the garden, Joe," he added. Milligan cursed to himself, cast a glance at the report which he had begun and followed Corbett, looking at his watch. "Mail'll be going in three-quarters of an hour," he muttered. "But my wife – " began the peasant. "Damn your wife," hissed Milligan over his shoulder as he closed the door. The peasant shook his head and sat on a

chair. Then he began to laugh again and said, "Well, that story about the cow was funny. Anyway, it doesn't matter about the ticket. She has only the neuralgy, but she'll kill me if I don't get the doctor. They say Milligan's wife doesn't sleep with him. Well now, what a woman she is."

Milligan had to listen to Corbett in the garden for fully ten minutes, about a rumour that the parish priest was trying to buy the widow Mullen's motor-boat. Corbett kept saying, "Don't say a word about it." And Milligan kept nodding his head and saying, "Boys, oh boys, what a clever rascal," though for the life of him he could not see anything unusual or clever or interesting in the parish priest buying a motor-boat. Then Mrs. Milligan rapped on the kitchen-window and told Corbett his dinner was ready and Corbett rushed away to wash his hands, forgetting all about Milligan and the motor-boat. "Christ," said Milligan, "I'll never get that report written," and he was running through the kitchen to his office when his wife ran out of the dining-room with an empty vegetable dish in her hand and caught him by the arm.

"Run quick," she panted, "half a dozen bottles o' Guinness. Be quick, man. The steamer'll be going in half an hour. They want to take them with them."

"But I have to write a report – " began Milligan as he backed to the door.

"Be off," cried Mrs. Milligan, stamping her foot.

It was only one hundred yards to Moroney's public-house, but Milligan was buttonholed twice on the way and he wasted five minutes. Moroney's was crowded by peasants who had just sold some pigs and were drinking one another's health. It was another ten minutes before he could get out with the half-dozen bottles. He was exhausted when he got back to his office. He had only a quarter of an hour left. He began to write. "Beg your pardon," said the peasant, "but – "

"Oh my God!" cried Milligan, "what *do* you want? Here, here, and be gone. Oh Mother of God," and he rummaged among his papers until he got the ticket. He signed it and threw it at the peasant. The peasant began to laugh when he got into the garden. Milligan again began to write, but the impossibility of getting the report finished in time for the post struck him. He threw down the pen, tore up the paper and stuck his thumb in his mouth. Then he struck the table and said, "I have it, begob." On a fresh sheet of paper he wrote, "Making fresh investigations *re* pig in bedroom. Next post. In haste. Milligan."

And hatless and breathless he just reached the steamer as she was casting off. He gave the letter to the steward.

"Just saved my bacon this time," he murmured.

XVI

The Wren's Nest

IT WAS A SUMMER'S EVENING JUST BEFORE SUNSET. Little Michael and Little Jimmy, both twelve year old boys, set out to look for birds' nests. They were both dressed alike, except that Little Michael's blue sweater and grey flannel trousers were of better quality than Little Jimmy's, since the latter was the son of a farm labourer and Little Michael's father was the magistrate and a retired army officer. They were both barefooted, with cuts on their toes, and each had a bandage on the big toe of the right foot. They skirmished along south of the village, crossing the crags, picking berries and talking about the nests they had. No use looking for a nest until one came to the hollow there beyond Red Dick's potato garden. There was a cliff there overlooking a grassy glen. The cliff was awfully hard to climb and so was unexplored, and there was where they were going to search. It would be a great feat to climb the cliff anyway, since the only person who had climbed it was Black Peter, the bird catcher, and of course he was sold to the devil and could do anything. No boy had ever been able to climb it beyond the little ledge about a quarter of the way up, a ledge that was always covered with bird dirt and discoloured with

cliff water that dripped on to it from a spring in the cliff face.

The two boys came to the cliff face and looked up. Then they looked at one another, their mouths open. "You go first," said Little Michael. "No, you go," said Little Jimmy. "No, you go." They argued a long time about it, but neither moved. "'Aw," said Little Michael, "I think it's too late to climb it anyway to-day. Let us wait until to-morrow, and put on stockings. Black Peter always wears stockings. Stockings stick to the cliff face." "You're afraid," said Little Jimmy, wiping his nose with the sleeve of his coat. "Who is afraid? My father fought in ten battles." "Climb it, then." "All right, let's climb it together." "Then who'll watch. We might be caught. Your father would summon me. That's certain." They kept silent for a minute and then lay on their stomachs on the grass looking up at the cliff. Sparrows were chirping hidden in the ivy. Right at the top, about sixty feet above the level of the glen, there was a deep slit in the cliff and several broods of starling were croaking there.

"There must be twenty nests there," said Little Michael. "There are forty. I counted them the other day," said Little Jimmy. "Let's throw stones at them." They threw a few stones up into the ivy

and a number of birds flew out screaming. Then they lay down again on the grass and watched. Suddenly Little Jimmy said "Hist!" His dirty face was lit up with sudden excitement. "What's that?" whispered Little Michael. "Hist!" said Little Jimmy, "I see a wren. Look." He pointed to a point far down in the cliff about five feet from the ground, where just a shred of ivy was growing, an offshoot from the main growth farther up. Little Michael nearly shut his eyes looking closely and saw a little brown ball moving slightly. The two boys held their breaths for a long time, lying quite still. Presently a tiny head peered out of the ivy. Then it disappeared again. Then it appeared again, looked around, and presently a wren flew out, circled around a little and landed on the fence to the left. Then it chirped lowly and sped away. Another little wren came out of the cliff in answer to the chirp and followed it.

"It's a nest," gasped both the boys together. They jumped to their feet and raced to the cliff, each trying to get there first.

They arrived at the cliff together and each thrust a hand into the little clump of ivy to get at the nest. There was a rustle of green leaves, a panting of breaths, and then their hands met in the ivy and they paused. They looked at one another and there was

poisoned hatred in their eyes. "I got it first," said Little Michael. "I touched it first." "Ye're a liar," said Little Jimmy, "I saw the wren first." "You call me a liar and your father was in jail twice." "I can beat you. I beat Johnny Derrane, and he beat you."

"Oh, you just try." They stood back from the cliff and looked one another up and down, each afraid of the other. The situation was intensely embarrassing, but just then one of the wrens flew back over the fence carrying a little wisp of moss in its mouth and saved the situation. They both looked at the wren, and said "Hist!" glad of some excuse to prevent them from fighting. The wren alighted on a fence to the left and became very busy pretending to have a nest in the fence. "Come away," said Little Michael, "if he sees us looking at the nest he will forsake it, and a forsaken nest doesn't count. That's well known."

"Oh, let's see how many eggs in it," said Little Jimmy. "Nobody will believe us if we can't say how many eggs in it." "You leave it alone," said Little Michael; "that's my nest. If you look at it, I'll tell my father." "Ha, spy," said Little Jimmy. Little Michael became very conscious of having made a fool of himself and didn't know what to say or do. He had an impulse to hit Little Jimmy, but he was

afraid to hit him. No use fighting anyway when nobody was looking. Nobody ever heard of anybody fighting when there was nobody looking, unless two brothers maybe, or a boy and his sister. "Maybe you think I'm afraid," he said at last. "Take care now, Little Jimmy, that you'd think I'm afraid." "Aw, I don't care," said Little Jimmy, dabbing his toe into the grass with a swagger. "I'm going to look at this nest anyway." He moved forward and Little Michael caught him by the two hands and they struggled. "Let me go," cried Little Michael. "You let me go," cried Little Jimmy. The two wrens were now hovering about screaming in an agonized state, but the boys took no heed of them. Each was trying to grab at the nest and the other trying to prevent him. The ivy was soon torn from the cliff and a little round hole became visible, a beautiful little round hole, suggestive of beauty within, and around the little round hole was a house built of moss. Then Little Jimmy grabbed at the nest caught it in the tips of his fingers, and as Little Michael pulled him suddenly, the nest came out of the niche and tumbled to the ground. It fell on the ground on its side and a little egg, a tiny egg, tumbled out. It was so light that it landed between two blades of grass and stayed there poised. The wrens on the fence set up a terrible chatter and then flew

away high above the ground. They would never come back.

The two boys looked at the nest in silence. "Now see what you've done," said Little Michael; "the nest is no use to us." "It's all your fault," said Little Jimmy; "you were afraid to look at it." "Who was afraid?" said Little Michael heatedly; "what do I care about a wren's nest," and he kicked the nest with his foot. The structure of dried moss burst in two pieces and several eggs scattered around. Both boys laughed, and began to kick the pieces of the nest and then tore them to shreds. The inside was coated wonderfully with feathers and down, interlaced with an art that could not be rivalled by human beings. The boys tore it into shreds and scattered the shreds. Then they pelted one another with the eggs, laughing excitedly. Then they paused, uncertain what to do, and they both sighed, from satisfaction. They were friendly again, the cause of their quarrel had vanished, destroyed by their hands.

"I got a rabbit's nest with three young ones in it," said Little Jimmy.

"Show it to me," said Little Michael and I'll show you a blackbird's nest with three eggs in it." "All right," said Little Jimmy and they scampered off, over the fence where the wrens flew away. Two

fields farther on they passed the wrens, already looking for another niche, but they did not recognize them. If they had they would probably have thrown a few stones at them.

XVII

The Black Mare

I BOUGHT THE MARE AT G—, FROM A RED-WHISKered tinker and, if the truth were only known, I believe he stole her somewhere in the south, for he parted with her for thirty shillings. Or else it was because she was so wild that there was not another man at the whole fair had the courage to cross her back with his legs and trot her down the fair green but myself, for it was not for nothing that they called me Dan of the Fury in those days. However, when I landed from the hooker at the pier at Kilmurrage and, mounting her, trotted up to the village, they all laughed at me. For she was a poor-looking animal that day, with long shaggy hair under her belly, and the flesh on her ribs was as scarce as hospitality in a priest's house. She didn't stand an inch over fourteen hands, and my legs almost touched the ground astride of her. So they laughed at me, but I paid no heed to them. I saw the fire in her eyes, and that was all I needed. You see this drop of whiskey in this glass, stranger? It is a pale, weak colour, and it would not cover an inch with wetness, but it has more fire in it than a whole teeming lake of soft water. So the mare.

I set her to pasture in a little field I had between

two hills in the valley below the fort. I cared for her as a mother might care for an only child, and all that winter I never put a halter in her mouth or threw my legs across her back, but I used to watch her for hours galloping around the fields snorting, with her great black eyes spitting fire and her nostrils opened so wide that you could hide an egg in each of them. And, Virgin of the Valiant Deeds, when she shed her winter coat in spring and I combed her glossy sides, what a horse she was! As black as the sloes they pick on the slope of Coillnamhan Fort, with never a hair of red or white or yellow. Her tail swept to the ground, and when the sun shone on her sides you could see them shimmering like the jewels on a priest's vestments; may the good God forgive me, a sinner, for the comparison. But what is nearer to God than a beautiful horse? Tell me that, stranger, who have been in many lands across the sea.

And then the day came when all the unbroken mares of Inverara were to be shod. For it was the custom then, stranger, to shoe all the young mares on the same day, and to break them before they were shod on the wide sandy beach beneath the village of Coillnamhan.

There were seven mares that day gathered together from the four villages of Inverara, and there were good horses among them, but none as good as mine.

She was now a little over fifteen hands high, and you could bury a child's hand between her haunches. She was perfect in every limb, like a horse from the stable of the God Crom. I can see her yet, stranger, standing on the strand stamping with her hind leg and cocking her ears at every sound. But it's an old saying, talk of beauty to-day, talk of death to-morrow.

I kept her to the last, and gave her to a lad to hold while I mounted a bay mare that my cousin had brought from Kilmillick, and I broke her in three rounds of the strand, although she had thrown three strong and hardy men before I seized her halter. And then my mare was brought down, and then and there I offered three quarts of the best whiskey that could be bought for money to the man that could stay on her back for one length of the strand. One after the other they mounted her, but no sooner did they touch her back than she sent them headlong to the ground. She would gather her four legs together and jump her own height from the ground, and with each jump they flew from her back, and she would run shivering around again until they caught her. I smiled, sitting there on a rock.

Then Shemus, the son of Crooked Michael, spat on his hands, tightened his crios around his waist, and said that if the devil were hiding in her bowels

and Lucifer's own step-brother riding on her mane, he would break her. He was a man I never liked, that same son of Crooked Michael, a braggart without any good in him, a man who must have come crooked from his mother's womb, and his father before him was the same dishonest son of a horse-stealing tinker. "Be careful," I said to him; "that mare is used to have men about her that didn't drink their mother's milk from a teapot." And when I saw the ugly look he gave me I knew that there was trouble coming, and so there was.

He got up on her all right, for, to give the devil his due, he was agile on his limbs and, although no horseman, there were few men in the island of Inverara that he couldn't throw with a twist of the wrist he had. But as soon as his legs rubbed her flanks she neighed and gathered herself together to spring, and just as she was that way doubled up he kicked her in the mouth with his foot. She rose to her hind legs and before she could plant her fore feet on the ground again to jump, I had rushed from the rock and with one swing of my right arm I had pulled him to the ground. I was so mad that before he could rush at me I seized him by the thigh and the back of the neck, and I would have broken every limb in his putrid body if they didn't rush in and separate us. Then the craven son of a reptile that he

was, as soon as he saw himself held, he began to bellow like a young bull wanting to get at me. But I took no heed of him. My father's son was never a man to crow over a fallen enemy.

They brought the mare over to me and I looked at her. She looked at me and a shiver passed down her flank and she whinnied, pawing the sand with her hind hoof.

"Take off that halter," said I to the men.

They did. I still kept looking at the mare and she at me. She never moved. Then coming over to her as she stood there without saddle or bridle, stepping lightly on my toes, I laid my right hand on her shoulder. "Pruach, pruach, my beautiful girl," I called to her, rubbing her shoulders with my left hand. Then I rose from the strand, leaning on the strength of my right hand and landed on her back as lightly as a bird landing on a rose bush. She darted forward like a flash of lightning from a darkened sky. You see that strand, stretching east from the rock to where it ends in a line of boulders at the eastern end. It is four hundred paces and it rises to the south of the boulders into a high sand bank underneath the road. Well, I turned her at the sand bank with a sudden flash of my hand across her eyes, leaning out over her mane. And then back again we came, with a column of sand rising after us and the

ground rising up in front of us with the speed of our progress. "Now," said I to myself, "I will show this son of Crooked Michael what Dan of the Fury can do on horseback."

Raising myself gently with my hands on her shoulders, I put my two feet square on her haunches and stood straight, leaning against the wind, balancing myself with every motion of her body, and as she ran, stretched flat with her belly to earth, I took my blue woollen shirt off my back and was down again on her shoulders as light as a feather before we reached the western end, where the men stood gaping as if they had seen a priest performing a miracle. "God be with a man," they cried. And the women sitting on the hillock that overlooks the beach screamed with fear and enjoyment, and of all the beautiful women that were gathered there that day there was not one that would not have been glad to mate with me with or without marriage.

Back over the strand again we went, the black mare and I, like lightning flying from the thunder, and the wave that rose when we passed the rock in the west had not broken on the strand when we turned again at the sand bank. Then coming back again like the driven wind in winter I rose once more, standing on her haunches, and may the devil swallow me alive if I hadn't put my shirt on my back again

and landed back on her shoulders before we reached the rock. There I turned her head to the sea and drove her out into it until the waves lapped her heaving belly. I brought her back to the rock as gentle as a lamb and dismounted.

Ha! My soul from the devil, but that was a day that will never be forgotten as long as there is a man left to breathe the name of Dan of the Fury. But all things have their end, and sure it's a queer day that doesn't bring the night, and the laugh is the herald of the sigh. It was two years after that I got this fractured thigh. Well I remember that four days before the races where I got this broken limb, I met red haired Mary of Kilmillick. As I was looking after her, for she had shapely hips and an enticing swing in them, my horse stumbled, and although I crossed myself three times and promised to make a journey to the Holy Well at Kilmillick, I'll swear by Crom that the spell of the Evil One was put on the mare. But that is old woman's talk. Mary promised me the morning of the races that if the black mare won I could put a ring on her finger, and as I cantered up to the starting point I swore I would win both the race and the girl if the devil himself were holding on to the black mare's tail.

Seventeen horses lined up at the starting point. I took up my position beside a bay stallion that the

parish priest, Fr. John Costigan, had entered. He was a blood stallion and had won many races on the mainland, but the parish priest was allowed to enter him, for who could go against a priest. Then, as now, there was nobody in Inverara who was willing to risk being turned into a goat by making a priest obey the rules of a race. Six times they started us and six times we were forced to come back to the starting point, for that same braggart, the son of Crooked Michael, persisted in trying to get away before the appointed time. At last the parish priest knocked him off his horse with a welt of his blackthorn stick and the race started.

We were off like sixteen claps of thunder. We had to circle the field three times, that big field above the beach at Coillnamhan, and before we had circled it the second time, the bay stallion and the mare were in front with the rest nowhere. Neck to neck we ran, and no matter how I urged the mare she would not leave the stallion. Then in the third round of the field I caught a sight of Mary looking at me with a sneer on her face, as if she thought I was afraid to beat the priest's horse. That look drove me mad. I forgot myself. We were stretching towards the winning post. The stallion was reaching in front of me. Mad with rage I struck the mare a heavy blow between the ears. I had never struck

her in my life and as soon as I had done it I started with fright and shame. I had struck my horse. I spoke to her gently but she just shivered from the tip of her ears to her tail and darted forward with one mighty rush that left the stallion behind.

I heard a shout from the people. I forgot the blow. I forgot the mare. I leaned forward on her mane and yelled myself. We passed the winning post, with the stallion one hundred yards or more behind us. I tried to draw rein. Her head was like a firm rock. I cursed her and drew rein again. I might have been a flea biting her back. At one bound she leapt the fence and swept down the beach. She was headed straight for the boulders. I saw them in front of me and grew terrified. Between us and the boulders was the sand bank, fifteen feet high. She snorted, raised her head and tried to stop when she saw the fall. I heard a shout from the people. Then I became limp. We rose in the air. We fell. The mare struck the rocks and I remembered no more.

They told me afterward that she was shattered to a pulp when they found us, and sure it's the good God that only gave me a broken leg.

XVIII

Sport: The Kill

WITH A WILD RUSH OF SCRAPING FEET, THE rabbit darted in under the flat rock. His right hind leg spat up a sliver of stone from the crag and disappeared, just as the dog's snout landed with a thud at the hole. The dog yelped as he tumbled head over heels with the force of his mad rush. The rabbit crawled along the straight groove in the crag under the rock. His claws made a rasping sound as, one after the other, his legs thrust his body forward. He left a trail of brown fur behind him. Midway he halted, panting. He saw the dog's black nose twitching and snorting at the far end of the groove in front. He painfully drew up his legs under his belly, twisted around his head so that he could see both entrances to the groove and waited. His sides pressed against the rock as they heaved.

A boy came bounding along from the left, skipping over the boulders that lined the cliff top. In his right hand he carried a dried long willow rod. He halted on a boulder and looked about him. The dog raised his head, looked at the boy, wagged his tail and barked. The boy whooped and rushed along the crag to the rock. The dog growled joyously and, throwing back his head, he scraped madly at the

hole, clawing the limestone crag impotently. The boy threw himself flat at the other end where the rabbit had entered, shut one eye and looked in. When his eye pierced the gloom and he saw the rabbit, he too growled.

The rabbit, seeing enemies on both sides, tried to stick his head through a tiny crevice to his left, where the rock rested on two cone shaped spurs of the crag. His head entered as far as the ears and could go no farther. He lay still, one ear bent double, the other ear flat on his back, the tip quivering, fanned by the dog's breath, that came through the damp groove in a pale blue column. Then a scratching sound reached him, coming towards his hind-quarters. The boy lying on his side was pushing the dried willow rod along the groove.

The end of the rod touched the rabbit's left haunch gently. It slipped up over the haunch and tipped the rock. Then it twisted with a grating sound and got stuck in the soft fur to the left of the tail. It twisted again. The skin on the rabbit's haunches went taut as it gathered around the tip of the rod. The rabbit started, held his breath and pulled his head suddenly from the crevice. He was stretching back his right hind leg to crawl away from the rod when he saw the dog's red tongue lolling between white fangs at the far end in front of him. With his

right hind leg crooked at the thigh, he paused, his eyes blinking, his whiskers twitching, his ears pressed down into his contracted neck. Again the rod grated and twisted. The skin of his stomach was drawn up to the ball of skin and fur that was gathering around the tip of the rod. Again the rod twisted. The skin around his crutch went taut.

The boy cursed. A spur of the crag had bruised his hip. He grunted and said "Hs-s-s-s" fiercely. The dog thrust his muzzle abruptly at the hole and barked. The bark re-echoed through the groove and the fur on the rabbit's neck quivered. The rabbit closed his eyes and bent down his head. The strong smell of the dog's breath was stifling him. Then the boy drew in a deep breath and tried to twist the rod again. His sweating hands slipped on the dried willow. The rod was too taut to turn. All the skin on the rabbit's body was as taut as the skin of a drum. The claws of his right hind leg gripped the crag with such force that their points were blunted. The dog raised his head and walked back a few paces to smell a snail that was crawling along the crag. Then he came back to the hole again, raised his left fore paw and cocked his head sideways.

Slowly, carefully, the boy began to pull the rod. For a few moments the pressure was so gradual that the rabbit did not feel himself being pulled. Then

suddenly his right hind leg that was bearing the weight of his body slipped backwards with a scraping sound that ended in a thud. His whole body began to slip, bumping against the crag, the fore feet pawing the ground. He allowed himself to slip back gradually, too dazed to resist. The dog sniffed cautiously at his hole. Then fiercely. He thought the rabbit was escaping. Darting across the rock to the boy, he yelped and thrust his snout down between the boy's face and the hole. Then he whined and darted back again to his own hole.

The rabbit was within a foot of the boy's hand at the mouth of the hole when the rod caught in a cleft, where the rock rested on a spur of the crag just within the mouth of the groove. The boy cursed and gave the rod a jerk. It failed to move. Then he pushed it back. The rabbit drew up his hind legs under him feeling the tension relaxed. Then the boy tried to give the rod another twist to free it. He had twisted it around slightly when the skin on the rabbit's left haunch burst with a snap. The rabbit jerked his head up and down suddenly and, striking the crag with his four feet, thrust himself forward with a wild squeal. The dog thrust his body at his hole furiously, cutting his muzzle against the crag. Then he lay on his belly, his eyes watery, his jaws slightly open. The boy jumped to his knees

and, seizing the rod with both hands, he wrenched it clean out of the groove with a large patch of the rabbit's skin at its tip. The rabbit blinded by the pain crawled straight ahead heedless of the dog. The dog drew back his snout. His tail stretched out. His eyes half closed. His chest shivered. The rabbit's head appeared. There was a smothered squeal and then a low crack as the dog's fangs met through the rabbit's neck.

The dog tossed the rabbit in triumph over his head as the boy leaped across the rock. The boy grabbed the rabbit's hind legs and kicked the dog fiercely on the ribs. The dog dropped the rabbit and ran back whining. The boy held up the body heaving as if it were leaping fences in its death agony. "High" he hissed through his teeth.

Then he bashed the rabbit's head on the rock.

XIX

The Sniper

THE LONG JUNE TWILIGHT FADED INTO NIGHT. Dublin lay enveloped in darkness, but for the dim light of the moon, that shone through fleecy clouds, casting a pale light as of approaching dawn over the streets and the dark waters of the Liffey. Around the beleaguered Four Courts the heavy guns roared. Here and there through the city machine guns and rifles broke the silence of the night, spasmodically, like dogs barking on lone farms. Republicans and Free Staters were waging civil war.

On a roof-top near O'Connel Bridge, a Republican sniper lay watching. Beside him lay his rifle and over his shoulders were slung a pair of field-glasses. His face was the face of a student – thin and ascetic, but his eyes had the cold gleam of the fanatic. They were deep and thoughtful, the eyes of a man, who is used to look at death.

He was eating a sandwich hungrily. He had eaten nothing since morning. He had been too excited to eat. He finished the sandwich, and taking a flask of whiskey from his pocket, he took a short draught. Then he returned the flask to his pocket. He paused for a moment, considering whether he should risk a smoke. It was dangerous. The flash might be seen

in the darkness and there were enemies watching. He decided to take the risk. Placing a cigarette between his lips, he struck a match, inhaled the smoke hurriedly and put out the light. Almost immediately, a bullet flattened itself against the parapet of the roof. The sniper took another whiff and put out the cigarette. Then he swore softly and crawled away to the left.

Cautiously he raised himself and peered over the parapet. There was a flash and a bullet whizzed over his head. He dropped immediately. He had seen the flash. It came from the opposite side of the street.

He rolled over the roof to a chimney stack in the rear, and slowly drew himself up behind it, until his eyes were level with the top of the parapet. There was nothing to be seen – just the dim outline of the opposite housetop against the blue sky. His enemy was under cover.

Just then an armoured car came across the bridge and advanced slowly up the street. It stopped on the opposite side of the street fifty yards ahead. The sniper could hear the dull panting of the motor. His heart beat faster. It was an enemy car. He wanted to fire, but he knew it was useless. His bullets would never pierce the steel that covered the grey monster.

Then round the corner of a side street came an old

woman, her head covered by a tattered shawl. She began to talk to the man in the turret of the car. She was pointing to the roof where the sniper lay. An informer.

The turret opened. A man's head and shoulders appeared, looking towards the sniper. The sniper raised his rifle and fired. The head fell heavily on the turret wall. The woman darted toward the side street. The sniper fired again. The woman whirled round and fell with a shriek into the gutter.

Suddenly from the opposite roof a shot rang out and the sniper dropped his rifle with a curse. The rifle clattered to the roof. The sniper thought the noise would wake the dead. He stopped to pick the rifle up. He couldn't lift it. His fore-arm was dead. "Christ," he muttered, "I'm hit."

Dropping flat on to the roof, he crawled back to the parapet. With his left hand he felt the injured right fore-arm. The blood was oozing through the sleeve of his coat. There was no pain – just a deadened sensation, as if the arm had been cut off.

Quickly he drew his knife from his pocket, opened it on the breastwork of the parapet and ripped open the sleeve. There was a small hole where the bullet had entered. On the other side there was no hole. The bullet had lodged in the bone. It must have fractured it. He bent the arm below the wound.

The arm bent back easily. He ground his teeth to overcome the pain.

Then, taking out his field dressing, he ripped open the packet with his knife. He broke the neck of the iodine bottle and let the bitter fluid drip into the wound. A paroxysm of pain swept through him. He placed the cotton wadding over the wound and wrapped the dressing over it. He tied the end with his teeth.

Then he lay still against the parapet, and closing his eyes, he made an effort of will to overcome the pain.

In the street beneath all was still. The armoured car had retired speedily over the bridge, with the machine gunner's head hanging lifeless over the turret. The woman's corpse lay still in the gutter.

The sniper lay for a long time nursing his wounded arm and planning escape. Morning must not find him wounded on the roof. The enemy on the opposite roof covered his escape. He must kill that enemy and he could not use his rifle. He had only a revolver to do it. Then he thought of a plan.

Taking off his cap, he placed it over the muzzle of his rifle. Then he pushed the rifle slowly upwards over the parapet, until the cap was visible from the opposite side of the street. Almost immediately there was a report, and a bullet pierced the centre of

:he cap. The sniper slanted the rifle forward. The :ap slipped down into the street. Then, catching the rifle in the middle, the sniper dropped his left hand over the roof and let it hang, lifelessly. After a few moments he let the rifle drop to the street. Then he sank to the roof, dragging his hand with him.

Crawling quickly to the left, he peered up at the corner of the roof. His ruse had succeeded. The other sniper, seeing the cap and rifle fall, thought that he had killed his man. He was now standing before a row of chimney pots, looking across, with his head clearly silhouetted against the western sky.

The Republican sniper smiled and lifted his revolver above the edge of the parapet. The distance was about fifty yards – a hard shot in the dim light, and his right arm was paining him like a thousand devils. He took a steady aim. His hand trembled with eagerness. Pressing his lips together, he took a deep breath through his nostrils and fired. He was almost deafened with the report and his arm shook with the recoil.

Then, when the smoke cleared, he peered across and uttered a cry of joy. His enemy had been hit. He was reeling over the parapet in his death agony. He struggled to keep his feet, but he was slowly falling forward, as if in a dream. The rifle fell from his grasp, hit the parapet, fell over, bounded off the

pole of a barber's shop beneath and then cluttered on to the pavement.

Then the dying man on the roof crumpled up and fell forward. The body turned over and over in space and hit the ground with a dull thud. Then it lay still.

The sniper looked at his enemy falling and he shuddered. The lust of battle died in him. He became bitten by remorse. The sweat stood out in beads on his forehead. Weakened by his wound and the long summer day of fasting and watching on the roof, he revolted from the sight of the shattered mass of his dead enemy. His teeth chattered. He began to gibber to himself, cursing the war, cursing himself, cursing everybody.

He looked at the smoking revolver in his hand and with an oath he hurled it to the roof at his feet. The revolver went off with the concussion, and the bullet whizzed past the sniper's head. He was frightened back to his senses by the shock. His nerves steadied. The cloud of fear scattered from his mind and he laughed.

Taking the whiskey flask from his pocket, he emptied it at a draught. He felt reckless under the influence of the spirits. He decided to leave the roof and look for his company commander to report. Everywhere around was quiet. There was not much

danger in going through the streets. He picked up his revolver and put it in his pocket. Then he crawled down through the sky-light to the house underneath.

When the sniper reached the laneway on the street level, he felt a sudden curiosity as to the identity of the enemy sniper whom he had killed. He decided that he was a good shot whoever he was. He wondered if he knew him. Perhaps he had been in his own company before the split in the army. He decided to risk going over to have a look at him. He peered around the corner into O'Connell Street. In the upper part of the street there was heavy firing, but around here all was quiet.

The sniper darted across the street. A machine gun tore up the ground around him with a hail of bullets, but he escaped. He threw himself face downwards beside the corpse. The machine gun stopped.

Then the sniper turned over the dead body and looked into his brother's face.

XX

Two Dogs

FEENEY, THE FISHERMAN, HAD TWO DOGS. ONE WAS a mongrel, a black dog, deep-chested and ferocious. The other was a yellow greyhound, thin and beautiful. The two dogs were deadly enemies. The mongrel was five years old when Feeney bought the greyhound as a pup. Before the greyhound's arrival the mongrel shared his little cottage with Feeney, followed him each day to the cliffs to fish and hunted rabbits. Whenever he killed one, which was not very often because he was not fast, he brought it in his mouth to Feeney and wagged his tail proudly. He was very fond of Feeney, and he was quite happy. Everybody feared his ferocity, and all the dogs in his own village and along the countryside fled when they saw him coming.

Then the pup came to the cabin, and the mongrel was no longer happy. He hated to see Feeney fondle it and feed it with milk, while he himself had to be content with potatoes and rockfish heads. He would sit on his haunches watching the long-legged pup sniff around the floor or tear at Feeney's trouser leg, and whenever he got a chance he bit at him. But Feeney beat him whenever he bit the pup, and he often had to lie on his back and allow the young

greyhound to tear at his throat fur and gambol over him. He would yawn savagely and loll his tongue, unable to satiate his rage.

Then the pup grew up and began to accompany Feeney to the cliffs to fish. He was still growing and ugly, and whenever a strange dog came near him he threw himself on his back and whined. So the mongrel despised him and felt sure Feeney would not prefer such an ugly cowardly creature to himself. One day Feeney beat the young greyhound for running away from a mangy terrier that was blind in one eye, and the mongrel was quite happy. He began to snap at the greyhound in the presence of his master without being interfered with. The young greyhound began to hate the mongrel and grew madly jealous of his deep chest, his strength, and his courage.

Then the greyhound grew to his full size, and he was beautiful to look at. He was almost twice the mongrel's height, and his snout was so long and pointed that he could lick milk from the bottom of a tumbler without touching the sides. His yellow coat was as glossy as silk, and he could outdistance anything. Almost without moving a muscle, he could jump from a standing position and go clean over Feeney's head without touching it. Feeney was delighted with him, and all the neighbours stopped

to praise him, so that the mongrel grew vicious with jealousy and took to howling at nights, until Feeney had to get up one night and give him a stiff thrashing with a broom handle.

But when the rabbit season came in again the mongrel turned the scales against the greyhound. The greyhound was slow to pick up a scent and could not follow one when he did get one. So while the mongrel methodically nosed along the rabbit's trail, the greyhound rushed about furiously, mad with excitement, jumping stone walls with his head in the air and absolutely useless. Then when the mongrel started the rabbit, the greyhound outdistanced him in a few strides, but was unable to catch the rabbit because of his own terrific speed and the rocky ground, which cut his delicate paws and made him stumble. And it always happened that the hound turned the rabbit into the mongrel's mouth, for the mongrel was old and cunning and knew his ground perfectly and the habits of rabbits. He knew when to follow over a fence and when to wait behind. He knew which side a rabbit would turn and when he was going to turn. So that he caught all the rabbits and the hound caught none. Nearly every day he came up to the cliff-top with a rabbit in his mouth and dropped it beside Feeney. Then he would gambol about, make a savage rush at the greyhound, and

come back again barking joyously as much as to say, "There's that useless greyhound." Feeney began to think the greyhound was worthless and took a dislike to him. When the greyhound crawled up to him and put his head under his armpit after a kill by the mongrel, Feeney gave him a sharp blow on the side with his bait hammer and sent him away.

Then one summer morning, just after dawn, when the rocks were still shimmering with evaporating dew and there was such a freshness in the silent air that it made each living thing throb with joy at the very fact of living, Feeney was going along up the slope of Coillnamhan Fort towards his usual fishing perch on the cliff-top. The two dogs were rushing about over the crags mad with the joy of early morning, sniffing at every hole and making desperate rushes at hummocks of grass, pretending that they concealed a rabbit. And at last the mongrel started one two fields below the cliffs, at the base of a steep slope that ended in the brink of a precipice that dropped two hundred and fifty feet to the sea. The greyhound was some distance behind, but the rabbit went through a hole in a high fence, and while the mongrel was running to a low part to jump, the greyhound cleared the high fence without touching it and got in the lead. The next field was very

craggy, and the greyhound fell twice and cut himself in several places, so that the rabbit reached the next fence before the greyhound could get up to him. That fence was a low one, and the greyhound took it at a flying leap and landed in front of the rabbit. The rabbit turned back into the field he had just left and was going through the hole just as the mongrel was jumping the fence. The greyhound doubled back over the fence and turned the rabbit once more, and the mongrel, who had cunningly waited the cliff side of the fence, tried to grab at the rabbit when he came through the hole the second time. But his foot caught in a crevice and he missed him. The rabbit raced up the grassy slope to his burrow on the cliff-top. The mongrel ran after him. The greyhound doubled back again over the fence with his head in the air and his tongue hanging. He whined and raced up the slope with his nose to the ground. Feeney threw down his basket and began to yell.

The mongrel suddenly saw the cliff-top and slowed down and began to bark. But the greyhound flew past him like a thunderbolt, and nosed the rabbit just as he was going to dip around the little rock at the cliff-top into his burrow. There was a muffled yelp from the hound and a scream from the rabbit, as they both went whirling over the cliff to the sea

two hundred and fifty feet below. The mongrel ran up to the brink of the cliff and looked down. He sniffed and let his ears droop. Then he began to bark joyfully and ran around trying to catch his tail.

XXI

The Hook

THE SEAGULL WAS VERY HUNGRY. HE WAS SOARING above the fishing village with his legs hanging down, his wings perfectly still, his head turned to one side and his sharp little eyes blinking. Above him and a little to the right, a large white flock of seagulls was cackling and diving about furiously. He alone was sailing on his own, very near the ground and perfectly silent. He saw something that he didn't want the other seagulls to see until he should get an opportunity of securing it for himself.

There it was, perched enticingly on a low stone fence, the fat red liver of a fish, about three inches long and as thick as it was long. The seagull ravened for it. He would swoop down immediately and bite at it, but he wanted to bring a share to his mate that was sitting on the eggs, on the ledge in the cliff. So he was waiting for an opportunity to rest for a moment on the fence, eat his own share and take the rest between his beak northwards to the cliff.

But he could not get an opportunity. The fence on which the liver rested bordered the lane that led from the well to the wide flat crag where the village women were washing and cleaning and salting the

fish that had been caught the previous night. Young girls continually passed along the lane carrying buckets of water to their mothers. And the seagull was slightly bewildered by all the noise and bustle on the crag, with the women in their red petticoats and little black shawls around their heads squatted on their heels, and their sharp knives making the white scales fly in little flaky showers from the fishes' backs. Their harsh cries, the flashing of the knives in the bright morning sun, the glittering piles of fish slipping about, all made the seagull's head swim with excitement and hunger and desire and fear.

At last he heard a hoarse "ga-ga-ga" close by him and another seagull swooped past the fence where the liver rested and then, banking a little farther on, doubled back, cackling aggressively as he came. The first seagull knew that the liver was discovered. He must wait no longer. He swooped upwards slightly, flapped his wings twice and then came straight down with a tearing sound. He landed lightly on the fence, took fright suddenly and looked about him, uttered a queer faint shriek and was going to spread his wings to fly again when he heard a swish and the other seagull landed beside him. The first seagull lost all fear, grabbed at the liver and tried to swallow the whole piece. He got

it into his mouth in two gobbles, while the other seagull picked at its end and screamed. Then with a wild yell a number of small boys who had been hiding under the fence a few yards to the right, jumped up and began to wave their arms. The second seagull screamed and darted away. The first seagull made a last violent gobble at the liver and got it completely in his mouth and then with a fierce swing of his wings he rose sideways.

But he did not rise far. With a smothered scream he came tumbling backwards. A hook had been hidden in the liver. Its barb was sticking through the seagull's mouth, in the soft part behind the lower bill, and a piece of string protruded from his mouth and was tied to a stone in the fence. The seagull was trapped.

He fell with wings outstretched inside the fence. He lay dumbfounded for two seconds, lying on his side, his little eyes motionless with fear and pain. Then a boy leaned over the fence and tried to grab at him. He fluttered away a yard or so to the full reach of the string and then when the hook jerked him back again, he uttered a fierce cry as if spurred to madness by the renewal of pain. Bending his head he rose with the graceful and powerful movement of an advancing wave. He rose in a twirling curve. There was a slight snap, a downward jerking

of his beak, then he uttered a joyful scream like a loud sigh and he flew upwards with a curling piece of string hanging from his beak. He had burst the string and left the small boys staring after him and cursing the weak string that had robbed them of their prey.

Higher and higher he whirled, upwards from the village and northward towards his ledge on the cliff and his mate. As he whirled and banked and plunged forward the string kept dangling and going through funny little convolutions, as if it were a long worm being carried off and trying to wriggle its way out of the seagull's mouth. And the whole flock of seagulls followed the hooked one, making a tremendous noise, screaming at one another and blinking their little eyes in amazement at the hook sticking from the trapped one's bill and the string dangling.

At last the seagull reached his ledge midway down a precipitous cliff. The sea grumbled far away beneath, and as his mate sat on her eggs her bill protruded over the sea, the ledge was so narrow. The trapped seagull landed beside his mate. She wearily stretched out her beak for food and then uttered a wild scream as she saw the hook. And breasting the ledge the whole flock soared about cackling. The trapped one, stupefied by all the

cackling, hid one leg under his wing and let his head fall until the tip of his bill touched the ground. A little drop of blood trickled along the bill and fell on the rock.

Then the female bird seized the string in her beak and, without rising from her eggs, she began to tear at it furiously, cackling shrilly the while, like a virago of a woman reviling a neighbour. The wounded bird sank down on his breast and let his head go limp, while the whole flock of birds hovered nearer and became more subdued with their cries. Some landed on neighbouring ledges and craned their necks to watch the female bird's furious pecking.

Soon the string was cut. Then she seized the hook by the barb that protruded from beneath the bill. She pulled. The male bird spluttered a cry and flapped his wings, but the female bird arched her neck and wrenched again. The hook came with her almost. But its circular end with the string tied to it remained in the male's beak. A little stream of blood ran out. Then the male bird, unable to endure the pain any longer, tried to wrench himself clear. He pulled backwards fiercely and left the hook in his mate's bill. There was wild and victorious cackling as the freed bird staggered to his feet, shook his beak, and then uttering a weak, plaintive, surprised

scream, dipped it into a little pool of water on the ledge.

His mate lay back on her eggs, smoothed her feathers with a shrug and closed her eyes in a bored fashion.

XXII

The Doctor's Visit

MAURICE DOWLING LAY FLAT ON HIS BACK IN HIS little narrow bed. He gripped the bedclothes in his two hands and held his hands up under his chin. He lay so flat and he was so slim that his figure was barely outlined against the bedclothes. But his feet stuck up at the end of the bed because the blankets were too short. His feet, covered by a rather soiled white cotton sheet, pressed against the black iron support. A yellow quilt lay sideways across his body, all crumpled up in the middle. The hospital attendant had arranged it several times during the night and warned Dowling each time not to touch it again, but Dowling always kicked it away from his chest. He wouldn't touch it with his hands to throw it away and he wouldn't endure having it near his mouth. He had an idea that the quilt was full of fleas.

His head, half buried in the white pillow, was very thin. His hair was black and cropped close. But even though it was cropped close, it was not stiff and bristly as close-cropped hair usually is. It lay matted on his skull in little ringletty waves. His face was deadly pale and his high cheekbones protruded in an ugly fashion from his hollow cheeks.

His large blue eyes kept darting hither and thither restlessly, never stopping for a moment. And his large mouth also moved restlessly.

Dowling was terribly afraid of the patients who were with him in the hospital ward. He had just come in the previous midnight. This was his first morning in the ward. All the patients were awake now waiting for the doctor's visit at ten o'clock. Ever since it became light and he could see their faces he became seized with a great horror of them. During the night he had heard queer sounds, wild laughter, whisperings and bestial articulations, but he thought he was merely suffering from the usual nightmares and noises in his head. Now, however, that he could see them he knew that it could not be a freak of the imagination. There were about forty of them there. His own bed was in the centre of the ward, near a large black stove that was surrounded by wire netting on all sides. Then both sides of the ward were lined with low iron bedsteads, little narrow beds with yellow quilts on them. All the beds were occupied except two by the glass door in the middle of the left-hand side of the ward, the door leading on to the recreation lawn. And the two patients who slept in those two beds were sitting in their grey dressing gowns at a little bamboo table playing chess. At one end of the ward there was a

large folding door and the other end was covered by a window through which the sun was shining brightly. Through the window, trees and the roofs of houses could be seen. Beyond that again, against the blue sky line, there were mountain tops.

Suddenly a patient began to cough and a silence fell on all the other patients. Tim Delaney had begun his usual bout of coughing preparatory to the doctor's visit. He did it every morning. The other patients enjoyed the performance. But Dowling was horrified by it. It gave him a nauseous feeling in his bowels, listening to the coughing. Tim Delaney was sitting up in bed, his spine propped against the pillow and all the bedclothes gathered up around his huddled body. He wore a white nightshirt with a square yellow patch between the shoulder-blades. His bed was only five yards away from Dowling on the right-hand side and Dowling could see his face distinctly. The face skin was yellow. The skull was perfectly bald. The eyes were blue and red around the rims on the insides. The whole head was square and bony like a bust of Julius Cæsar's head. When he coughed he contorted and made a movement as if he were trying to hurl himself forward and downward by the mouth. His cough was hard and dry. Delaney had an idea that he was a cow and that he had picked up a piece of

glass while eating a bunch of clover. According to himself the piece of glass had stuck in his throat and he could not swallow any solid food on that account. "That fellow must be mad," thought Dowling, as he looked at the queer way Delaney opened his jaws and bared his yellow teeth when he coughed. Dowling experienced the sensation of being gradually surrounded by black waves that presently crowded up over his head and shut out everything. A buzzing sound started in his ears and he forgot Delaney. He stared at his upright feet without blinking. A fixed resolution came into his head to tell the doctor everything. He decided that it was positively no use trying any longer to keep up the pretence of being ill. He was better off outside even if he died of starvation. He could not possibly endure the horror of being in such an environment. He had schemed to get into hospital in order to get something to eat and now that he was in hospital he could not eat. But then he had not expected to get into such a hospital, among these terrible wild-eyed people, these narrow sordid-looking beds, this dreary bare ward, with a big fat man in a blue uniform and a peaked laced cap, continually walking up and down, shaking a bunch of keys behind his back and curling his black moustache. And the food was so coarse. He had been given a tin mug full of sickly half-

cold tea and a hunk of coarse bread without butter for breakfast. Naturally he couldn't touch it, desperate as his circumstances had been for the past six months. Instead of that he had expected to get into a hospital where there were pretty nurses, who smiled at a man and whose touch was soothing and gentle. He had expected kindness, quiet, rest, sleep, delicate food, treatment for the heaviness behind his eyes and his insomnia and the noises he heard in his ears. It was cruel torture to suffer from hunger, to starve in his tenement room, alone and without anybody to whom he could talk when he felt ill at night. But anything was better than this. He would endure anything if he could only be alone again. So he thought, looking at his feet.

Then the attendant came up to Delaney's bed and shook his keys in Delaney's face. Delaney stopped coughing. The attendant clasped his hands behind his back and marched slowly up the ward towards the folding door through which the doctor would enter at any moment. All the patients cast suspicious and lowering glances at the attendant as he passed them. The attendant examined each bed with a melancholy and fierce expression in his blue eyes. He seemed to be totally unconscious of the existence of human beings in the beds, or of the malicious glances directed towards him. In silence

he would point a finger at a tousled sheet or a blanket or a piece of paper lying on a coverlet. The patient in question would tidy the place pointed at with jerky eagerness. Not a word was spoken. A deadly silence reigned in the ward. There was an air of suspense.

Suddenly the silence was broken by the sound of loud laughter coming from the outside of the folding door through which the doctor was to enter. Then the two wings of the door swung open simultaneously. The doctor and his attendant nurse appeared, each inviting the other to enter first. The nurse, a tall, slim, pretty, red-haired young woman of twenty-six, with a devilishly merry twinkle in her blue eyes, held her case sheets in a bundle under her right arm, while she held the door open with her left hand. The doctor, Francis O'Connor, was a middle-sized, middle-aged fat man, dressed in a grey tweed suit, with a gold watch-chain across the top button of his waistcoat. He waved his stethoscope at the nurse with his left hand, while the short fat white fingers of his right hand pushed back his side of the door. His jovial fat face was creased with laughter and little tears glistened in his grey eyes.

"Miss Kelly," he gasped, between fits of apoplectic laughter that shook his fat girth, "upon my soul

there isn't a word of a lie in it. Go ahead. Ladies first."

Then he himself entered first, still laughing. The nurse followed him, coughed, took up the fountain pen that hung from her waistband and dabbed at her hair with the end of it. The attendant came up at a smart pace, saluted and whispered something to the doctor. The doctor's face became serious for a moment. He glanced in Dowling's direction. Then he began to smile again, rubbed his palms together and looked at the ceiling, at the floor, at the walls, at the windows, smelling everywhere.

"Upon my soul," he said at last, turning to the nurse, "does my old nose – sniff, sniff, – deceive me or can I smell roses?"

The nurse nodded, swallowing her breath modestly. She pointed to the glass door that led to the recreation lawn. "It's from that bush that grows by the wall," she murmured, "I saw three there last night."

"Hm" said the doctor and he walked over to the first bed, throwing out his feet sideways without moving the middle of his body.

Dowling's heart had begun to beat wildly when the doctor entered the ward. He was delighted and relieved, for the moment, of all anxiety. Now everything would be all right. He could transfer all his worries to that jolly man, with the kind fat face.

And what a pretty nurse! Though her face was rather hard. Dowling began feverishly to prepare his confessions. He would explain everything. Then they would discharge him immediately. And in all probability the doctor would take an interest in his case and find him employment suitable to an educated man of good family. He became absorbed in the contemplation of what would happen after that. With his pale cheeks flushed and the extremities of his limbs throbbing with excitement, his mind soared off into a day dream, building castles in the air.

The doctor pulled the clothes back off the first patient's chest. He put his stethoscope to his ears and bent down to listen without looking at the man's face. The patient, formerly a peasant farmer named John Coonan, lay perfectly still with his hands lying flat on his abdomen. He stared at the ceiling through little fiery grey eyes that were set close together with a little pointed yellow nose between them. He imagined himself to be hatching twelve eggs in his stomach and he insisted on lying perfectly still, lest he should disturb the formation of the birds.

The doctor's face gradually lost its merry creases as he listened here and there and tapped here and there. His eyes became sharp. Then they began to

blink. Then his whole face looked cross and he straightened himself and cleared his throat. "Now my man . . ." he began absent-mindedly and then he stopped, puffing out his cheeks. He turned to the nurse and whispered to her, holding her arm as he walked to the next bed: "Now how can ye explain that? That man was getting better yesterday and to-day he's a foregone conclusion. Well, well. It's very queer." He went up to the next bed.

The patients in the ward had been silent and attentive until then, but suddenly they seemed unable to concentrate any longer on the doctor's presence. They began to practise with voice and limb the grotesque imitations of whatever their crazed imaginations conjectured themselves to be. Dowling was startled out of his reverie by the gradual renewal of insane sounds about him. Again the true fact of his environment became real to him. He began to tremble violently. The doctor was proceeding rapidly down the ward, casually examining the fairly healthy patients. Dowling could catch the doctor looking at himself now and again. Whenever he caught the doctor's eyes looking at him, the doctor turned away hurriedly. "He'll soon be here," thought Dowling excitedly, "and I can see he's interested in me already. He sees I'm different from the rest. Now how am I going to commence to talk to him?"

The doctor paused to look at the two old patients who were playing chess. The players never took any notice. Their gaze was concentrated on the board intently. One old fellow had his fingers on a black queen, making tentative excursions in all direction. and then coming back again to his starting point. He had his lips sucked far into his toothless mouth. The other old man, clasping his dressing-gown about his withered body, looked on murmuring endlessly: "Five minutes' pleasure and I have to suffer a life-time for it. Five minutes' pleasure and I . . ." The doctor walked away, followed by the nurse and the attendant.

They passed Dowling without looking at him. This irritated Dowling. He felt slighted. He ceased to tremble and his face darkened. The doctor went to the end of the ward and then came back rapidly up the other side. When he was just at the far side of Dowling's bed, he stood at the distance of a yard behind Dowling's head. He began to laugh and told the nurse a funny story about a greengrocer named Flanagan who had made a large fortune through contracts for the new government, in which he had relatives. This fellow Flanagan, a lean, stingy, mean, ignorant peasant, according to the doctor, went off from Harcourt Street Station every Sunday morning with his golf sticks, to play on his, Dr.

O'Connor's club links. He was a great joke, this fellow Flanagan. The doctor went on telling anecdotes about Flanagan, laughing violently in a subdued tone while he talked. But all the while he kept examining Dowling's head while he talked and laughed. Dowling's body was twitching in the bed with vexation.

The doctor finished his story and again he moved on and passed Dowling's bed without looking at Dowling. Dowling saw him pass and could restrain himself no longer. He called out angrily: "I say, doctor, I want to speak to you." The doctor turned about sharply and looked at Dowling seriously. The attendant came up to Dowling and whispered in his low passionless voice: "You must wait your turn." Then the doctor moved away again from bed to bed, talking, answering questions, examining the patients and joking with the nurse. Dowling watched him, boiling with rage. He decided that he would tell the doctor nothing. He wanted to kill somebody. Why should they persecute him like this? Could nobody in the world be kind to him?

At last the doctor reached the end of the ward and turned back. He came down towards Dowling hurriedly, his face creased in a smile. When he was within five yards of Dowling he held out his right hand and called out: "How are you, Mr. Dowling?

Now I can attend to you." Dowling immediately became soft and good humoured and smiled, a wan smile. The doctor sat down on the bed, still holding Dowling's hot thin right hand in his own fat two hands. He was looking into Dowling's wild, strained, big blue eyes with his own little half serious, half merry, half sharp eyes. A mist came before Dowling's eyes. He swallowed his breath and then he began to talk rapidly, pouring a volume of words out without stopping for breath.

"This is how it happened," he began. The doctor bent down his head, he kept fondling Dowling's hand and listened. Dowling described how his mother died young while he was in his last year at college studying for the Indian Civil Service. His mother, a government official's widow, had an annuity that expired with her death. So Dowling, who had no other means of support, had to leave college and get employment as a newspaper reporter. That was eighteen months ago.

"I tell you," whispered Dowling, lowering his voice and almost shutting his eyes, "that what got on my nerves was . . . er . . . a queer thing and it may appear silly but . . . you know I couldn't give expression to something that was in me . . . somehow . . . I don't know how to tell you . . . of course I'm not a genius . . . but every man you know . . . of

a certain class, of course, doctor . . . I don't know your name . . . every man has some creative power . . . and reporting work is awful . . . telling lies and rubbish day after day . . . and nobody understood me . . . everybody seemed to think that I was cocky and thought myself, on account of my family and that sort of thing, you know, better than the others . . . so that I chucked it six months ago and knocked about since . . . and then, desperate, I pretended to be ill so that I could get into hospital. . . ."

He had been talking at a terrific pace and stopped suddenly to draw breath. Speaking rapidly, the doctor interrupted him in the same jerky low tone. "And then, of course, you went to kill the editor, just to make people believe you were ill," murmured the doctor.

Dowling suddenly stiffened in bed. He dragged his hand from the doctor's two hands. He held his two hands clenched in front of his face. His face contorted into a demoniacal grin. His eyes distended and then narrowed to slits. His body began to tremble. Gibbering, he began to mutter. Then he became articulate.

"I'll kill the bastard yet," he screamed, "I'll kill him. Where is he? Where is he?"

Screaming he tried to jump out of bed, but the attendant's giant hands were about him. He felt

himself pressed down into the bed, flat on his back. Gibbering, he lay there trembling. Then another fit overcame him and he roared. The ward became filled with sound. All the other patients began to scream and cry and babble.

"Padded cell," murmured the doctor to the attendant. Then he sighed and walked away to the door.

XXIII

The Wild Sow

OLD NEDDY THE FISHERMAN, OF KILMILLICK, bought a sow pig one day in Kilmurrage. He put the pig in a bag, dropped it into one of his donkey's creels and brought it home to his cabin. It was just six weeks old, a little black pig, with a long back, and big ears that dropped over its eyes and a little tail curled up in a knot.

The neighbours were surprised when they heard that Neddy had bought the pig, for he was an old man and lived alone in his two-roomed cabin and he had no land except a little patch in front of his door that grew enough potatoes to last him the year round. He was, too, very fond of drink, and whenever he had any money he stayed in Kilmurrage until he had spent it. So that the neighbours wondered what possessed him to buy the pig. In fact Martin Conroy came into Neddy's cabin and said, "Brother, it's plain that they fooled you into buying that young pig, so if ye'll throw ten rockfish into the bargain with it, I'll give you a pound for it."

Neddy hitched up his belt, glanced at Conroy with his little grey eyes and told him to get out of his cabin. Then he shook his fist after Conroy and said, "I'll have money while I have that pig and that's

why I bought it. So may the devil choke the lot of you."

He made a straw bed for the little pig in the corner of his kitchen and sawed off the lower part of a barrel in which he salted his fish to make a trough for it. For a while he looked after it carefully and gave it plenty of potatoes, dry fish and whatever sour milk he could get from the neighbours. So that the sow got big and fat until it was six months old and fit for sale. But when a jobber came to look at it and asked Neddy what price did he want, Neddy told him to get out of his cabin. "I have money," he said, "while I have that pig, so I'll keep it."

That was in the month of April and Neddy's stock of potatoes had been all eaten by the sow and most of his dried fish along with the potatoes, so he turned the sow loose on the roadside to eat grass, saying, "Now feed yerself and may the devil choke you." And he took his basket and his fishing lines and went away to fish.

The sow wandered about on the road all the forenoon, smelling at everything, snorting furiously and making little short runs that made her foot joints snap under her fat body like hard biscuits being cracked, when a horse or a peasant driving a cow went past. She rooted among the grass until her head was caked with earth up to her eyes. Then

towards her feeding time at midday she trotted back to the cabin, but the door was locked. For a time she waited at the door grunting and with her ears cocked listening to every sound, sniffing the air with her twitching hairy snout and tossing her head now and again in vexation. Then, when nobody opened the door, she began to whine with the hunger. She stood there motionless and whining until Neddy came back at dusk and let her into the cabin. He only gave her fish guts and potato peelings for her supper. "From now on," he said, "you'll have to fend for yourself, and may the devil choke you."

That went on for a fortnight with Neddy away fishing every day, and then the sow got thinner and wild with hunger. She began to eat grass by the roadside and roamed over the crags picking nettles and everything she could get hold of. She no longer snorted when horses or cows passed her. Her bristles grew rough and strong and her ears lost their tender transparency. Her eyes were hardly visible through the caked dirt that gathered around them. She used to run out of the cabin in the morning and never come near it again until dusk.

At first she roamed about the village of Kilmillick, eating grass and nettles, tearing up the ground for roots, chewing everything she found in rubbish heaps, old fish bones, rags, boots and potato skins.

Then, as the summer grew, the heat and the long days tempted her farther, down to the beach and along the lanes and the road leading to Kilmurrage. Often she never came back to the cabin for two or three days at a stretch, but would spend the night among the sandhills about the beach where the wild grass was very sweet and there was always a dog-fish or a piece of mackerel cast up by the sea among the weeds. Her bristles were now as stiff and thick as needles, and her black skin beneath them was cracked by the sun and scarred in places where dogs bit her or boys struck her with stones and dried sea rods when they cornered her in narrow lanes. All her flesh had hardened into muscle. She was lean like a hound and nearly as tall as a year-old donkey.

Towards the end of summer a jobber came again to Neddy and asked him would he sell the sow. "She's not much good now," said the jobber, "so I'll give ye a pound for her. I might be able to soften her a bit and get a litter from her." "Get out of my cabin," said Neddy, "and may the devil choke you. I have money while I have that pig, so I'll keep the pig." But the fishing was bad that year and he had to sell his donkey in order to buy flour for the winter. Still he wouldn't sell the pig. "It's like having money in a bank," he would say, "a pig is always money. I often heard my father say so."

But when winter came on and the ocean winds swept the crags viciously and sea foam was falling like snow over the cabins, the sow could go out no more, but sat on her haunches on her straw litter in Neddy's kitchen grunting and whining with the hunger.

Then one stormy day Neddy went into Kilmurrage to sell his dried pollock. He turned the pig out of the cabin and locked the door. Then he went away. The sow roamed about for awhile shivering with the cold and weak with hunger. Her stomach was drawn up into her back so that she looked like a cat that is stretching itself. She could discover nothing to eat around the village so she came back to the cabin.

She got on her knees at the door and began to gnaw at the bottom until she made a hole for her snout; then she seemed to go mad and tore at the door with her teeth and battered it with her head until she burst it off its hinges and she pushed right under it into the cabin. The door hung on one hinge and the sow's right ear was gashed down the middle by a nail in the jamb.

She stood in the middle of the kitchen grunting, with her snout to the ground and with blood dripping from her ear in a steady stream. Then she tossed her head and rushed at Neddy's bedroom door.

Sticking her snout at the bottom near the jamb, she pushed and burst the string with which the door was fastened and got into the bedroom. Neddy's potatoes were lying in the far corner with a little wall of stones around them. His sack of flour stood against the wall near the potatoes. His dried rockfish were stacked on pieces of paper under the wooden bedstead. The sow began to eat. Snorting and tossing her head she ran from the flour to the potatoes and then to the rockfish, swallowing huge mouthfuls without chewing, and making a noise like a horse pulling her hoof out of a bog, until her stomach swelled out to a point at each side.

Then a big potato stuck in her throat.

When Neddy came in that evening he found her lying on her side, stone dead.

XXIV

A Pot of Gold

IT WAS A MOONLIGHT NIGHT IN JULY. THE SKY WAS very big, blue and silent. The valley of Rossmore, lying between towering rocky mountains that rose on either side of it, was peaceful. It was covered with a light grey mist, calm, as if it slept. A very long way off frogs croaked in a marsh.

Just before midnight four men came up the lane from the hamlet of Rossmore, going towards Mount Simon. As they crossed the flat stretch of hunch-backed moor, through which the lane ran before it reached the foot of the mountain road, they halted. They had been walking, owing to the narrowness of the lane, in single file. John Gillan, who was in front, pulled up suddenly and then the other three, one by one, had to halt suddenly, thrown one on top of the other, with their hands thrust out in front of them to protect themselves from falling, panting with terror of the weird, silent night and of the sombre, empty mountainside.

John Gillan was a thickset man, wearing a raincoat that had been washed to a whitish colour and reached from his throat to the insteps of his black heavy boots. A black slouch hat fell about his face. The moonlight shone on his fat red face and on his long

grey beard as he turned sideways to talk to Barney Rogers who came behind him. Leaning on a light crowbar he held in his two hands with its end resting on the grass, he bent his head and whispered. "Have ye got the black-handled knife?" he said.

Barney Rogers was a slight, tall, young man, dressed in an old blue suit, with the coat reaching down to the middle of his thighs in Irish fashion and a grey tweed cap perched at the back of his curly black head. He was so thin that the cartilages in his neck were visible as he strained forward his head towards Gillan. His little grey eyes opened wide and his little snub nose quivered. He clapped his hand on his left trousers pocket, felt the pocket and then he whispered: "Sure I have. Here it is under my hand."

"Make sure," whispered Gillan. "It's very important, the black-handled knife. We're not safe without it."

"Here she is," whispered Rogers pulling out a little black-handled pocket-knife. "Ye can see for yerself."

Gillan crouched down and peered at the handle. The other two men crowded around, with a swishing noise of heavy boots coming through grass. The three men, breathing loudly and murmuring, bent down, feeling the knife handle and peering at it.

Rogers, with his head and shoulders outlined in the moonlight above the stooping forms of the other three men, winked both eyes and wrinkled up his face at the sky, as if he were bursting with suppressed laughter.

"She is black, sure enough," said Gillan at length.

"She is," whispered the other two men. They were two brothers called Higgins and they worked on Gillan's farm. They were big men dressed in grey frieze trousers and blue jerseys. They stood with their mouths open and a wild look in their black eyes. The two of them carried hammers in their hands.

Rogers carried nothing in his hands. He was a stone-cutter. He lived alone in a little cabin and he was rather a notorious character.

The four of them moved off again in single file, Gillan leading. They turned to the left, along the road that went up the side of Mount Simon until it reached the Reservoir. About half-way up Rogers said "Hist" and tapped Gillan on the right shoulder. Gillan stopped with a start and looked behind him sideways.

"We leave the road here and turn on to the crags to the left," whispered Rogers. "The rock is within two hundred yards of here."

Gillan took off his hat and blessed himself. The Higgins brothers did likewise, murmuring the prayer aloud as they crossed themselves. After a little pause Rogers also took off his cap and blessed himself.

"Let's sit down for a minute," said Gillan.

"We had better open the bottle," said Rogers.

"Very well," said Gillan, "but mind, it's to be only a short swig."

He fumbled within his raincoat and took out a quart bottle of whiskey. The four of them crouched under the little low stone fence as if they were hiding from something. The moon shone brightly on the white narrow road, the grey fence and the mountain side getting blacker and blacker as it faded away in the distance. Gillan had drawn the cork in the house but he was fooling with it a long time before he could draw it again. At last it came out with a soft sound. The sweet fragrance of the whiskey rushed out into the still night air.

They all drank, Gillan first. Then Gillan put the bottle back. The Higgins brothers kept peering over the top of the fence to the left with their mouths open. Gillan buttoned up his raincoat and then gripped Rogers by the left knee. Rogers was kneeling on his right knee with his left knee doubled up and his elbow resting on it.

"Now are ye sure ye dreamt of it three nights running?" said Gillan.

"As sure as I have an immortal soul," whispered Rogers fiercely, taking off his cap and holding it with both hands to his breast. "Three nights running I've seen that flat rock with red moss growing on a corner of it. Then the rock is raised up in the dream and there is a dead black cat lying under it and then down below that again, down far into the ground, through the rocks, there is a black iron pot on three legs and that pot is full of gold sovereigns. Full to the brim and the top ones are rusty."

Gillan and the two Higgins brothers listened with awe.

"Can ye say how far down the pot is?" said one Higgins, the one called Pat, a man with large red ears, and warts on his hands.

"Shut yer mouth, Pat Higgins," hissed Gillan, angry that his farm labourer should ask questions on the matter in his presence. "Can't ye see that I'm talkin'?" he added arrogantly after a pause. Then he turned to Rogers and said in a stern tone: "Now look here, Barney Rogers. Ye've made me buy a quart bottle of the best whiskey and ye've brought me out here at dead of night, to the danger of my immortal soul with believing in yer dreams, so, be the Cross of Macroom, if yer fooling me about the

rock and the cat and the pot of gold . . . well, ye may look out for yerself. That's all. Come on, men. You go ahead, Rogers. Lead the way to yer rock."

To the left of the road the side of the mountain was bare and broken. Limestone rocks, deeply creviced, protruded everywhere unevenly, with here and there a little clump of withered heather or grass. The ground was jagged in places. They walked slowly. Several times Rogers halted, holding up his hand behind him to the others. Then he would bend down on his hands and knees examining the ground about him. At last he said, "Ha!" excitedly and darted forward to a little eminence. The eminence was crowned by an oblong flat rock.

"Exactly as in my dream," cried Rogers, getting down on his two knees on a little bunch of withered heather beside the rock. He took off his cap with one hand and pointed to the rock with the other. "Look at the red moss," he whispered to Gillan.

Gillan's voice died in his throat as he tried to say something. Then he nodded his head and got on one knee beside Rogers, holding the crowbar upright in his right hand. The Higgins brothers sat on their heels with their hammers in their hands and their mouths open. They kept darting their eyes around in terror. All kept silent for several seconds. Their breathing was loud in the silence. The sound

of each man's breath was distinct from the others, with the four sounds mingling irregularly. Gillan's shadow fell across the rock, his long beard sticking across the short shadow of the crowbar.

"Let's have another drink before we begin," whispered Rogers at last.

In silence Gillan took out the bottle and uncorked it. When the cork came out with a flop the Higgins brothers started violently. All drank. Gillan took off his raincoat and rolled the bottle in it.

"In the Name of God," he said, "let's begin. Are we to break the rock or turn it?"

"Turn it, turn it," said Rogers. "You three turn it. I'll stand here with the black-handled knife in my hand."

Rogers stood up, opened his knife and, holding it out in front of his body in his right hand, he said: "Now turn it." The three men, brushing against one another roughly, gripped the rock and heaved with all their might. The rock skidded and turned a complete somersault off its bed. All looked at the bed.

A dead black cat lay stretched there, with his yellow eyes open.

The Higgins brothers yelled and ran over the crags to the road, their heavy boots slipping among the stampeding cattle. Gillan had not screamed, but he

jumped back and he put his hand to his throat and gripped his chest, just above the pit of his stomach, with the other hand. Just there his Scapular of the Sacred Heart was hanging on a cord. He murmured a prayer. Rogers stood behind and it was impossible to see the expression on his face in the darkness. He made no sound. At last Gillan spoke.

"It's the black cat," he whispered, "he's there. D'ye see him?"

"I see him," whispered Rogers. "It's him sure enough. There he lies, just as he lay in the dream guarding the treasure."

"How are we going to get him out of it?" asked Gillan fearfully. "Who is going to touch him and maybe be burned alive, Lord between us and all harm."

"I'll do it," said Rogers, "I'll do it. Give me the bottle. It'll be the devil to touch him."

"There, take a good drink," said Gillan, handing him the bottle.

Rogers took a long swig. Then he rested, smacking his lips. Then he took another swig. Gillan, excited and looking at the cat, took no notice of him. Rogers cast a glance at Gillan and then he hastily put the bottle to his head again, took a little hurried swig and rammed in the cork. The two Higgins brothers arrived back just then, walking on their toes, with

their hands raised outwards like men walking a tight rope. Gillan shook his fist at them and scowled for some reason or other.

Rogers stood up, holding the black-handled knife open in his right hand. With a sudden movement he swept his cap from his head and threw it from him to the ground. Gillan and the two brothers watched every movement breathlessly. Then, holding the knife over the cat, Rogers stooped down and grasped it by the tail. He lifted the tail. The cat came up, stiff and flat like a pancake. There was a burnt spot, a spot as big as a shilling, on the cat's left side below the shoulder. Pat Higgins, staring wild-eyed at the cat, saw the yellow spot and started slightly. Then he shivered and looked at Gillan. Rogers walked away five paces on tiptoe and then placed the cat gently on the ground. Then he wiped his forehead with the back of his hand and came back to Gillan, looking exhausted.

"Yer a brave man, Barney," whispered Gillan in an awed tone.

"Give me . . . a drink," mumbled Rogers, dropping on one knee and wiping his forehead.

He took the bottle in his hand and pulled the cork. Then he turned to Gillan and said: "Now it's safe for ye to go ahead and dig. But be careful. If ye see a bone or a feather don't touch it. Tell me and I'll

take away the spell with my knife. I'll sit here and watch, for fear the cat 'd change into a devil and burn ye alive. As long as I keep looking at him with the whiskey in me hand, he is helpless. Now hurry up and begin to dig."

"Right," cried Gillan excitedly, standing up.

"Come on, men," he hissed; "get to work and bend yer backs at it. I'll loosen the stones with the crowbar."

Under the flat rock the stones were small and loose for about six inches, and under that there were thin layers of stone with black earth in between. The three men, panting and perspiring, cleared away the loose stones and then Gillan began to dig the layers with his crowbar and the two Higgins brothers tore away the loosened stones with their hands, breaking one now and again with their hammers. Rogers, kneeling on one knee with the open bottle in his hand, asked now and again, "D'ye see any sign of the pot?" and as each time Gillan replied that he didn't, Rogers said, "Work harder," and he took another swig at the bottle.

Gillan dug like a madman, his eyes gleaming avariciously down into the hole. Already he pictured himself digging his hands into the golden sovereigns, clutching handfuls of them.

Then suddenly Rogers held up the bottle to the

moonlight. It was half empty. He glanced around him hurriedly, and bared his teeth in a grin. He got to his feet. He moved away towards the road three paces backwards. Then he paused and called out: "Dig, dig, something tells me ye are within a foot of the pot. Dig, dig like hell." Then he turned and ran on his toes like a deer to the road without making a sound. If he made as much noise as a tramcar the three men digging would not have heard him at that moment. Then Rogers vaulted the low fence into the road and disappeared.

The three men worked away for a long time. At last Pat Higgins paused to take breath and looked behind him at the spot where Rogers was kneeling. He started and nudged Gillan. Gillan turned about and looked where Higgins was pointing. Rogers had disappeared. Soon the three of them had dropped their tools and were standing about, looking everywhere with wonder in their face, silently. Nobody spoke for at least a full minute. At last Pat Higgins swore out loud and clenched his fists.

"What is it, you fool?" cried Gillan angrily.

"It's my Aunt Mary's cat," yelled Higgins. "Ye've been made a fool of, John Gillan. I know the yellow spot on his side now. Oh, by the . . ." and he began to swear a terrible string of oaths as he rushed over to the old dead black cat and lifted him up. There

was the same yellow burnt spot. They all looked at it.

Gillan raised his clenched fists above his head and stuttered, unable to speak with rage.

"Three days ago the cat disappeared and nobody knew what happened to him. It's how Rogers killed him. He should be arrested for it."

"Arrested," yelled Gillan, suddenly becoming articulate and turning on Higgins, "d'ye want my name all over the county? Don't speak a word of this or I'll have yer lives. Don't give it to say to the dirty illegitimate son of a tramp that he made a fool of me. Oh, holy mother of God, how am I going to live the shame and disgrace of it?"

All the way home he kept wringing his hands and crying aloud.

XXV

The Fight

BLACK TOM, A PEASANT, LEANED AGAINST THE counter of Mulligan's public-house. In spite of his large mouth being open, his breath going in and out through his nostrils sounded like steam hissing from a kettle. His upper teeth stuck out. A lock of hair hung down over his forehead beneath his tam-o'-shanter cap. All his bones and limbs were awkward and he was so tall that he looked slim. Nobody knew how tall he was. He must have been six feet and three inches.

As he leaned against the counter, his body seemed to be melting like snow, it looked so loosely knit together, and he changed his weight from leg to leg restlessly. His dim blue eyes strained wide open, stared stupidly at the counter. He was very drunk. It was the first time he had been drunk in six months. He had sold a pig at the fair in Kilmurrage for five pounds. He gave four pounds to his wife and told her to go home. She begged for the fifth, so he had to give her a few cuffs on the ear to get rid of her. Then he had drunk six pints of Guinness's porter in Mulligan's.

"Another pint," he said to the barmaid, and as he spoke, he hiccupped. Then he heard somebody

laugh behind him, and wheeling around cumbersomely, like a horse carrying a great weight, he saw his enemy Bartly Sweeney enter the bar with two friends. He tried to think why Bartly Sweeney was his enemy, and for the life of him he could not remember why he was, but he felt certain that he was. So he said "Hello Bartly, hello there, boys, what are ye havin'?"

Each of the three men wiped his mouth and said, "Mine is a pint!" Bartly Sweeney a square young man in a grey frieze trousers and blue sweater with a horsewhip stuck in his belt, spat on his hand and took Black Tom's in his.

"How are you, Tom?" he said.

"Fine, how's yerself?" said Tom, trying to smile and only succeeding in looking stupid, like a child looking at a stranger.

The barmaid brought Black Tom his fresh pint and he ordered three more for Sweeney and his friends. Sweeney began to talk to the barmaid, bantering her, and then Black Tom drew in a great breath that almost burst his nostrils, they swelled so much. He knew at that moment why Sweeney was his enemy. He was jealous of Sweeney, because Sweeney was a good-looking fellow and a great favourite among the women. It was common knowledge that Kitty Cooney, Black Tom's wife, was in

love with Sweeney before she married Black Tom. Perhaps she is in love with him yet, thought Black Tom, staring at his pint. He despised his wife, but it was another matter having her in love with Sweeney, perhaps having children by him, same as he had heard it said women did in the United States. And Sweeney had been in the United States.

He felt a sudden desire to hit Sweeney on the top of the head, but just then Sweeney turned to him laughing over something he had just said, and Black Tom laughed too, shifting his weight to his other leg, and spitting out with a great noise in his throat. He knew now that Sweeney had followed him in to fight him.

"Here's luck." "Good luck." "Long life."

They all drank. While he had his pint to his lips Black Tom was seized with a sudden fury and finished his pint at a draught. He would show this fellow Sweeney that even though he was ugly and had two teeth sticking out over his lips, that he was a strong man and able to drink his liquor. He dropped his empty pint on the counter with a bang, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and tightened his belt, but nobody took any notice of him.

Sweeney was still talking to the barmaid and the

other two men were listening to him. Black Tom felt irritated because nobody took any notice of him. He looked at the barmaid. She was leaning on the counter on her elbows, with her head cocked slantwise. Her breasts nearly showed above the neck of her blouse, as they pressed against the counter and her elbows. Her fuzzy hair was neatly piled on her head and her cheeks were flushed, listening to Sweeney's jokes. Black Tom suddenly felt a desire for her. Why the devil had he not married her instead of Kitty Cooney? Why, Sweeney had all the women in the island after him and he was not married at all. The dog. He looked at Sweeney.

Sweeney's sleek face was clean shaven and ruddy. His jaws were fresh and pink after the lather. The lines of his lips under his well-trimmed moustache were clear cut and regular. There was a nonchalant deviltry in his blue eyes, half covered by his eyelids. The very pose of his well-made body leaning far to the left was insulting. Black Tom could stand it no longer. He struck the counter with his clenched fist and roared. The barmaid started, put her hands to her throat and said "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph." But strangely enough, neither Sweeney nor his two friends took any notice whatsoever. Black Tom roared again. Sweeney turned around, put his hands

under his armpits and looked at him. There was silence for three seconds. Black Tom was debating furiously in his mind what he should say to Sweeney.

"What's that ye said to me last year?" he screamed at last. "Are ye as good a man now as ye were last year?"

Sweeney put his back to the counter and leaned an elbow on either side of him. Then he cracked the third finger and thumb of both hands.

"I don't care what I said last year or this year," said Sweeney.

There was silence for several seconds, while the two men stared furiously at one another. Then Black Tom stamped on the floor with his right foot and yelled again.

"There isn't a man in Inverara as good as me," he cried. "I could beat all the measly, rat-whiskered, pock-marked sons of drunken priests in Kilmurrage with my little finger."

Then he roared again and began slowly to unbutton his waistcoat, finding great difficulty in keeping himself steady on his feet.

"I'll tell you what's the matter with you," sneered Sweeney, his face set in a contemptuous grin. "You need somebody to wipe your nose."

Black Tom growled, stamped with both his feet,

ground his teeth and moved back a pace to spring or something, and fell on his buttocks on an empty barrel. Then he commenced to howl as if he were weeping.

"I'm alone," he wailed, "I'm alone among three of them, and there is nobody to hold my coat while I knock both the eyes out of his head. For God's sake, why don't somebody hold me back before I kill him."

Then Sweeney seeing that his enemy was getting panic-stricken, tightened his belt around his waist, threw away his horsewhip, a penknife, three fishing hooks and an Agnus Dei. He stood in the middle of the floor and stamped with his right foot in a bellicose manner.

"I'm standing as God made me," he cried, addressing the barmaid with a conceited look in his eyes, "and I haven't a weapon on me and no man is going to raise a hand to help me. And what's more I can knock the life out of any man that was ever conceived by a drunken father, and there's one present."

The other two men sniggered and Black Tom, having by now exhausted all his rage against Sweeney, for by nature he was a good-tempered man, roared again to show everybody that he was not afraid. He jumped to his feet and with a final effort threw

off his waistcoat. It fell on the counter and knocked down a pint. Everybody rushed to pick up the pint and everybody shouted "Don't break the house."

"I'll break everything," cried Black Tom, and, avoiding Sweeney, he rushed around the room hitting the walls with his head, biting the chairs with his teeth, kicking wildly. Sweeney moved over to the counter, eager to avoid coming into contact with him. The barmaid began to scream. The other two men, brave because they were not expected to fight, caught hold of Black Tom and tried to expostulate with him. But as soon as they seized him, Black Tom became really angry. He became savage. He became conscious of his great strength. He seized one of them in each hand and with one swing sent them crashing against the wall, where they fell in a heap. Then he rushed at Sweeney, but Sweeney stepped aside skilfully. Black Tom crashed against the counter, where he lay in a heap while Sweeney stood warily waiting with his fists doubled by his side. Black Tom lay on the counter for a long time. His brain began to work again. He became afraid. He felt that he was making a fool of himself. He might get arrested. What was Sweeney doing over there behind him?

Why were they all silent? He pretended to be very

drunk, although he was now almost sober. He spluttered and hiccupped and threw his hands about him on the counter aimlessly. Then he struggled to an erect position, and pretending not to see Sweeney, tore at his shirt and blubbered, "There isn't a man – "

Then Sweeney, nervous with fear that Black Tom was going to seize him and crush him to death in his mighty arms, hit him suddenly in the jaw and he fell in a heap to the floor.

After a while he came to his senses and heard them talking.

"Poor man," said the barmaid, "there's no harm in him, only he loses his reason when he has a little drop taken."

"Nobody was sayin' a word to him," said Sweeney.

"If it was anybody else threw me like that – " said one of the men.

Black Tom felt ashamed of himself, but he was too weak to assert his dignity by fighting. Instead he drank two glasses of whiskey hurriedly and left the public-house. On his way home he wept loudly. He would stand in the middle of the road and grind his teeth and swear that he would kill Sweeney some day.

When he got home he broke all the delph in the

house. He whittled out a stick to thrash Sweeney and finally fell asleep on the hearth. Next morning he had a sick head when he went to work.

He did that twice every year.

XXVI

Colic

IT WAS SATURDAY AFTERNOON IN THE VILLAGE OF Cregg. There had been a little pig fair that morning and everybody was drinking his neighbour's health. It was a June day and very hot. From end to end of the Main Street people were standing outside the doors of the public-houses, with pint glasses full of black cold porter clutched in their strong red hands. There was loud laughter, hearty oaths and the smacking of thirsty lips. Here and there a man was drunk and singing some ridiculous song as his wife tried to bring him home.

The only two thirsty and unhappy men in the village of Cregg were Tom Hanrahan and his friend Mick Finnigan. They had no money. Their credit was valueless because of their liquor debts. None of the farmers would treat them, since neither of them had any land and were therefore people of no account. Hanrahan was a kind of botch carpenter and Finnigan always acted as his labourer.

They leaned against the fence outside Mrs. Curran's public-house. Hanrahan had his hands in the pockets of his ragged old dungaree overalls. He wore an old blue coat, very shiny at the elbows and with a big tear, unmended, over the right pocket.

The uppers of his light unpolished shoes were level with the ground on the outside of each heel and the inside of each heel was almost as high as when it was bought. So that when he walked he had to lift his feet up high, like a Chinaman wearing slippers without heels on a cobbled street. His shoulders slouched and he had a slight hump, less by nature than because of his habit, when he cracked a joke, of bunching himself together with his mouth wide open and his elbows dug into his sides as if he were hugging himself. He was a short, thin man with little blue eyes, a sharp, long nose, a big mouth and a sallow complexion.

Finnigan, on the other hand, was a huge heavy man, with a rosy, fat face, sleepy blue eyes and a sandy moustache. He never smiled. He hardly ever spoke, and when he stood still anywhere he always crossed his arms on his massive chest. He once drank four pints of Guinness's porter without drawing breath.

Suddenly Hanrahan clapped his hands together, opened his mouth wide and began to laugh without making any noise. Tears began to glitter in his little eyes. Finnigan looked at him stupidly with his mouth open.

"What's up?" said Finnigan.

"I know how we can get drinks," gasped Hanrahan

at last. Tears had begun to run down his sallow cheeks with laughter. Then he was seized with another fit and doubled up against the fence, mumbling: "Oh, my side, I'm afraid I laughed too much, oh, my side."

"Foo," said Finnigan, shifting his back to get a more comfortable stone in the fence for the support of his shoulder blades. Then he opened his mouth again to speak, but forgot what he was going to say before he could say it, owing to laziness and the heat of the day. He subsided against the fence in silence, like a bladder out of which the wind is escaping slowly. He crossed his legs and dropped his chin on his neck.

Then Hanrahan suddenly became serious. He came over to Finnigan. Putting one hand on Finnigan's chest and the other hand on the fence he reached up and began to whisper in Finnigan's ear. He was whispering a long time rapidly. When he had finished Finnigan shook his head several times, scowled and said "No," with great emphasis. "Now look here," said Hanrahan in an irritated tone, "listen to me." He began to whisper again. Gradually the look on Finnigan's face changed. The scowl vanished. The fat, red cheeks, with little white flakes on them from sunburn, broke into creases. He opened his mouth and guffawed three

times, just like this: "Haw," then a gasp and then again "Haw."

"D'ye see?" said Hanrahan, digging him in the ribs with his elbow.

"Yes," blubbered Finnigan, laughing down in his chest heavily. "I . . . I see what ye mean now."

"Well, are ye game to do it?" said Hanrahan.

"Would I get arrested?" asked Finnigan, with his forehead wrinkled and a suspicious look in his eyes.

"Devil a fear of ye," said Hanrahan. "Who's to know the difference."

They were both silent for a long time, almost a minute. Hanrahan was watching Finnigan's face anxiously. Finnigan was looking at the ground, his forehead wrinkled, his mouth open, his eyes staring vacantly at something to the left of him. At last he looked up and said, "All right I'll do it. Where?"

"Here. Here where ye stand," cried Hanrahan excitedly. "Now mind what I told ye. Just do what I told ye. Now go ahead. It's dead easy. Leave the rest to me. Just do what I told ye. Hurry. Go ahead, man."

Finnigan cast a suspicious glance about him and then he let himself fall heavily down by the side of the fence. He made a terrific, crumbling, brushing,

dull noise falling. He was wearing grey heavy frieze trousers, a navy blue jersey and heavy hob-nailed boots that were white with caked mud and dust. He lay in a cumbersome soft mass on the ground, lying on his stomach. He gripped his stomach and began to yell. He bellowed like a bullock. Hanrahan rushed over to him, tried to turn him on his back, shook him and then jumped to his feet.

He ran out into the middle of the road, waved his hat into the air and began to shout: "Help, help. A doctor, or he's dead. Help, help." People rushed out of Mrs. Curran's public-house crying: "What's the matter, what's the matter?"

"He's got the colic," shouted Hanrahan, rushing over to Finnigan and going down on his knees. "He's got the colic. My God, if I had only a drop of brandy for him." He began to rub Finnigan's stomach furiously. Finnigan writhed and bellowed with monotonous regularity.

"What is it?" cried Mrs. Curran, a short, stout woman in a black dress, with a silver watch hanging on her right bosom from a black satin strap. Her son had become a General in the Free State Army and she gave herself "airs," as the people said. She pushed up through the crowd until she faced Hanrahan and Finnigan.

"Mrs. Curran," cried Hanrahan pathetically, as he took off his hat. The crown of his head was completely bald. Some half-drunken man in the crowd giggled and cried: "Oh sweet Virgin, isn't the full moon out early this quarter." "Mrs. Curran," continued Hanrahan, holding his hat in his hand, "may yer soul rest in Heaven and save his life with a drop of brandy. An' didn't he soldier under yer son General Curran an – "

"Mary," called Mrs. Curran shrilly, "bring out a noggin o' brandy, quick."

Hanrahan raised his hands and eyes to Heaven and murmured a blessing on Mrs. Curran. At the same time he nudged Finnigan with his right knee. Finnigan bellowed and began to kick the ground with his heels. He made a noise like an earthen floor being beaten with a heavy hammer. The same half-drunken man who had remarked on Hanrahan's baldness began to laugh, but somebody else told him to shut up and asked him whether he was a Turk or what. A quarrel started and the greater part of the crowd surged away down the road after the two men who had begun to quarrel.

Then the girl came running out with a noggin of brandy in a tumbler. Hanrahan grasped the tumbler. Holding the tumbler in his hand he began to thank Mrs. Curran again. But the sight of the

brandy was too much for Finnigan. He stopped bellowing and gripping his stomach. He sat up suddenly.

"I must drink yer own sweet health, Mrs. Curran, first – " Hanrahan was saying, when Finnigan reached out over his shoulder and grasped the tumbler. A few drops of the brandy spilled as Finnigan wrenched the tumbler from Hanrahan's hand. Then at one gulp he swallowed it, every drop of it.

"Scoundrel," yelled Hanrahan, gripping Finnigan about the body and biting at him with his teeth all over the chest. "Son of a wanton," he hissed between bites, "robber, may yer bones be sucked dry in hell by hungry little devils, you – "

But Finnigan jerked himself up and swung Hanrahan aside against the fence. He rose to his feet slowly and ponderously with Hanrahan hanging to his jersey. He looked around him foolishly.

"I'll have ye arrested, the two of you," cried Mrs. Curran, beside herself with rage at the trick that had been played on her. The crowd was laughing.

Finnigan, as soon as he heard the word "arrested," opened his eyes and his mouth, looked about him wildly, struck at Hanrahan blindly and missed him.

Then he yelled and started off at a bound through the crowd, headed westwards towards the road leading to his native village four miles away. He left a large strip of his blue jersey and of his cotton shirt in Hanrahan's bony fingers. He ran up the road, the hobnailed soles of his boots almost hitting him in the broad back as he ran, his back all ripped open and naked in parts, with remnants of his clothes slithering about his body. The people yelled with laughter. Even Hanrahan forgot his anger and laughed.

But Mrs. Curran did not laugh. She kept shaking her fist at Hanrahan and shouted: "I'll have ye arrested for fraud unless ye pay me for that noggin of brandy. So I will."

"Yerrah, is it out of yer mind ye are, woman?" cried a fat farmer, with white side-whiskers. "Is it a mangy drop o' brandy ye'd put in front of a good laugh. Here an' be damned to ye is the price of yer whiskey. Come on," he added to Hanrahan, "begob, yer worth a drink for that." And he burst out laughing again.

"Begob an' he's worth another from me," cried another farmer. "Have one on me too, the curse o' God on ye for a humorous cratur, Hanrahan."

Laughing, shouting, cheering, Hanrahan was led off to another public-house by the delighted farmers.

As he was going away he turned on the retreating and discomfited Mrs. Curran and cried: "To hell with the upstart General Curran and up the Republic."

XXVII

Josephine

IT WAS AN AFTERNOON IN JUNE. THE SUN STOOD over the town of Kilmurrage like a ball of fire and everybody was going about perspiring and cursing. Down by the sea on the western outskirts of the town, the house of the retired district inspector of police lay sheltered from the heat. The sun played on its back furiously, but the front of it, facing the sea, was in the shade. The retired district inspector was a man of taste and regularity, and the front of his house was arranged skilfully to give comfort in warm weather. A verandah supported by four concrete pillars was covered with ivy, rosebushes, and evergreens. The garden, surrounded by a low wall of concrete, was neatly arranged in flower beds and all the beds were in bloom. In the centre of the garden was a little avenue covered with brown, yellow, and black sea pebbles, while beneath, separated from the house only by the limestone road and a sloping beach of coloured sand and pebbles, the sea murmured, gently fanned by the breeze.

But the couple sitting on folding chairs, beneath the verandah in front of the dining-room window, were utterly unconscious of their good fortune in being so favourably situated on such a sultry day.

The intoxicating mixture of smells, of flowers and the sea that was wafted up to them in the shade by the gentle breeze seemed only to make them gloomy. In fact the girl who sat on the right, Josephine Johnston, the daughter of the retired district inspector of police, was crying. She was sitting deep down in the chair, with her knees high up and pressed together, while her head was cast down on her lap and her two hands held a handkerchief to her eyes. And her body heaved spasmodically as she sobbed. Sitting on the left was George O'Neill, son of the principal shopkeeper in Kilmurrage, and a medical student in his final year in Dublin. He was not crying, but he was blowing his nose violently. And his face, which was naturally a brick-red colour, seemed to be about to burst with the exertion. His long, flabby, well-fed body was stuffed into the chair and it seemed to protrude from it at certain points like a badly made up parcel. He was evidently going somewhere, for in spite of the heat of the day, he was wearing a heavy blue suit, a light grey overcoat and a starched collar. Then he stuffed his handkerchief into his sleeve, crossed his leg and said, "Oh, damn that sea," looking viciously in front of him.

The girl took no notice of him, but she stopped cry-

ing. Then after a moment she raised her head and looked out at the sea. The breeze blowing against her white linen skirt showed her long, bony legs, bared to the knees, and even her body that was sunk in the chair seemed to be bony. In fact when she bent her head a moment later to cough into her handkerchief, the bone at the back of her neck stuck out like a pointed cone. But her face redeemed the bony appearance of the rest of her. She had an intellectual face, deep blue eyes, broad forehead and freckled cheeks and . . .

But George O'Neill was in no mood to take an interest in her intellectuality. "Josephine," he mumbled and blushed to the roots of his neck at hearing himself breathe her Christian name. "Josephine, don't make a scene. Now look here. Damn it, what is it all about? I don't know. I come here to say good-bye and . . . Now Josephine you know quite well . . . Oh, why in the name of goodness do you sit there saying nothing?"

He raised his voice trying to appear injured and impressive, but he was obviously very embarrassed. The apple in his neck was hitting against his collar every time he drew breath and he tore at his collar nervously.

"I suppose I am foolish," said Josephine, and the sight of her intellectual, cultured face looking so

dejected and meek before the vulgar son of the shopkeeper would move a cinema audience of women to tears, more specially since she was twenty-eight, a Master of Arts and a brilliant woman, and he was only twenty-four, rather stupid and more acquainted with the racecourses and the bar-rooms off O'Connell Street haunted by students, than he was with the products of human culture.

"Hadn't we better talk it over," continued Josephine, gathering courage and daring to look sideways at O'Neill.

"But what is there to talk over? I came here to bid good-bye. You immediately get into a fuss and start crying. Goodness gracious, what is there . . . Oh, here, don't start again for God's sake."

Josephine had again taken her handkerchief to her eyes and her shoulder blades showing through the clinging muslin of her dress jerked upwards as she stifled a sob. Then suddenly she dropped her handkerchief to the ground, wheeled around in her chair towards O'Neill, scattering the pebbles with her right heel as she dug it into the earth. The meek expression left her face. It became imperious and aristocratic, and her voice too when she spoke was hard.

"Do you forget yesterday, Mr. O'Neill?" she said.

O'Neill looked at her stupidly and his mouth fell open and he opened his eyes wide.

"Yesterday? How yesterday? Oh-h-h, I see."

"Oh, do you? Did you think that you could play with a woman . . . that you could . . . kiss me and then forget it the next moment?"

"But good gracious, Josephine," spluttered O'Neill, wrinkling up his forehead and waving his hands, "what is in a kiss. Everybody kisses. You know very well all that bunkum is all . . . all very well for storybooks. You said so yourself."

"How dare you take advantage of what I said? You cad."

"You call me a cad, do you?" cried O'Neill angrily, jumping to his feet. "You the daughter of a damn police inspector call an O'Neill a cad."

He stood over her with his fists clenched and then suddenly looked towards the gate and then darted his eyes around looking for his hat. Then Josephine, terrified that he was going to leave her, jumped to her feet and caught him by the coat lapels with both hands and put her face up to his. She trembled all over and her lips twitched.

"Oh, don't go, George," she cried; "don't leave me. Sit down. I'm sorry. Do you hear? I'm sorry. I didn't mean what I said. Sit down and listen. I want to tell you something."

O'Neill puckered up his forehead and sat down again with his hands in his overcoat pockets and Josephine sat staring in front of her at the sea, with her hands in her lap. For a few seconds there was silence but for the sibilant murmur of the sea on the beach and two peasants going along the road to the left laughing loudly.

"You see," began Josephine, "you don't understand how lonely it has been for me here. Three winters now all alone with my father. If you could only hear the sound the sea makes on that beach at night in winter. It's dreadful, and then the biting wind and the silence in spite of the wind, each dull bleak day followed by a dark night. Oh God, it has cut into my heart."

"But you as an educated woman could find amusement in reading and thinking," said O'Neill, afraid that some plot lay behind this picture of loneliness, and eager to minimize it.

"And then you came back this spring," continued Josephine, paying no heed to his remark, "and I thought that . . . Oh, George, can't you see that I love you?"

She had leaned far out of the chair towards him as she spoke, and her eyes looked at him passionately and her red lips were open and the lower lip twitched. For a moment she looked at him that way passion-

ately and longingly and then suddenly she flushed, became embarrassed and dropped her eyes. He had merely stared at her coldly in return.

"Don't you think this is a bit theatrical, Josephine; sentimental, in fact," he said. She shrugged her shoulders. "Damn it," he cried querulously and struck his knee with his fist. Her silence gave him courage and his weak mouth almost set firmly. "Look here, Josephine, you have taken an advantage of me, that's what it is, and then you turn around and call me a cad. You're no child, you know. They tell stories about you in Dublin. You didn't give a damn then what you did to a fellow. Lots of them broke their hearts about you and there isn't a man that knew you that doesn't say . . . There you are now. As soon as I say a damn word you start crying. Say Joe, I'm sorry, but you can't have it all your own way."

"But George, you are the first man – "

"Oh yes, and suppose the other fellows took the point of view that you were the first woman."

"But George, you kissed me."

"Just once."

"No, three times."

"Well, what's the difference? We are both bored here. We go for a walk. You with your talk of free life, free love, free woman and all that kind of thing.

It would be different if there had been anything serious, but you know yourself, quite well, that there was nothing!"

He waited for her to speak, but she was silent, looking at the pebbles. He noticed that her breasts made no impression against her dress and he shuddered slightly.

"Well," he said, "is that all you have to tell me?" As he waited he wondered how he could have been such a fool as to flirt with her. What a change three years had wrought in the woman that had been the rage of all the young men in Dublin. Her high cheek bones, the rings around her eyes, her long legs.

"Yes, I have something to tell you," she said weakly; "but as it makes no difference to you that I love you – "

"Of course it makes a difference," he said, thinking that it put him in an embarrassing position. But Josephine was twenty-eight, *passé* and foolish, and she thought that he had spoken meaning that he . . .

"Oh George " she said, "I am glad. How happy you make me when you – "

"But good gracious – "

"What I wanted to tell you was that Chris Nolan wants to marry me."

"Chris Nolan of Ballymullan?"

"Yes."

"Ha. Well?"

"What am I to say to him, George?" She waited, tapping the pebbles with her toes, and her finger toyed nervously with the cross that hung on her breast, while she kept looking to the left away from O'Neill. O'Neill tore at his collar. The apple in his throat ran up and down and in and out. His brick-red face became purple. He kept moving the muscles in the calf of his right leg and through his brain were running a mixture of thoughts, of relief and embarrassment. Chris Nolan was the proper man for her. Forty and fairly wealthy. It would relieve himself of all feeling of guilt. But would she make a scene if he told her to marry Nolan. Damn it, that would be awful. In a moment he was tempted to make her his mistress and then leave her, but he thought of her long bony legs and the breasts that made no impression against her dress and . . . "Well," he said at length, looking at the top button of his overcoat. "Really, I don't think that's a fair question to ask me. After all, that's your own business and . . . I'm only twenty-four and haven't qualified yet, and it's very possible that I'll fail my final in September and . . . I say, Josephine, you could do worse things than marry Nolan. He has money."

"Oh, damn money," said Josephine, stamping with both her toes. "I don't care if you never qualify, George. I can work. We can just live together."

"Good God, Josephine." O'Neill put his handkerchief to his forehead. "Surely you're not thinking that I . . . I merely mean that I was not fitted to advise you as to marrying Nolan. I hope you didn't think that I had any intention of . . . After all, my career . . . Oh, damn it." He bit his lip ,conscious that he was making a fool of himself. He began toying with his collar. Then he looked at Josephine and started. Her face was set in a cold stony stare. Her hand hung limply by her side and she was nodding her head, as if in answer to some question that her brain was asking.

"Josephine, I say, Josephine. I didn't mean to hurt you."

Josephine laughed, not mirthlessly but mirthfully. There was a sparkle in her eyes as she laughed. "Go away, George," she said lowly and calmly.

O'Neill stood up awkwardly and took his hat. He reached out his hand. "Good-bye Josephine," he said.

"Good-bye, George," said Josephine without moving.

O'Neill waved his arms and turned to go, but as he was stooping to go out under the verandah on to the drive, he felt his coat tail being pulled. He

turned around. Josephine was still sitting in the chair, looking up at him, her face set in a passionate stare. "Kiss me," she said shortly, reaching out her hands. "There is plenty of time," she added as O'Neill bent down to her.

Again the thought of making her his mistress came into his head and he paused with his mouth near her lips. He made a gurgling sound in his throat. She was looking at him with desire, her body passive, a gleam in her eyes. He shuddered slightly. He brushed her lips with his. Then he turned away hurriedly. As he went down the path, he rubbed his mouth with the back of his hand. Her lips had felt so dry and sticky.

Josephine sat still, looking in front of her while he was going down the drive, dimly listening to the crunch, crunch of his shoes on the pebbles. Then when the gate banged to and she heard the bolt shoot into the niche in the concrete post, she raised her head hurriedly and looked at him. He saw her through a corner of his eyes, but pretended not to see and walked away furiously to the right in the direction of the pier. As he walked, he felt a ticklish feeling in his thighs and down the backs of his calves as if he were walking in a field with his back to a bull. Then he dipped into a hollow of the road.

Josephine sprang to her feet when she lost sight of

him. She ground her teeth and a look of hatred came into her eyes. She felt she could drive a dagger into his heart. She did in fact make a motion with her right hand as if she were driving a dagger. Then she saw his head coming around the turning of the road. She noticed the bald spot behind his right ear. She had never noticed it before. His shoulders came into view. She noticed for the first time that he had a slight hump. Then his whole body came into view passing a gate. She noticed that he had flat feet. Then he was lost from view again. She went back to the chair, shrugged her shoulders and laughed. Then she lit a cigarette, crossed her legs and leaning her head on her hands looked out at the sea. "Good God, I made a fool of myself. Ugh." She shuddered at the thought of it. Then she heard the *Duncairn* blow her whistle shrilly and she jumped to her feet. "Gracious me, the post is gone and I promised a reply to-day. Hey Ellen. Ellen, you get your shawl at once," she cried, rushing through the hall into the sitting-room. As she wrote the solitary word "Yes" on a postcard she called out to the servant, "Take this to the steward of the *Duncairn* and tell him to post it at once as soon as the ship reaches the mainland." Then she placed the postcard in an envelope and addressed it to "Chris Nolan, Esq., Solicitor, Ballymullan."

Then, sitting down again in the chair puffing her cigarette, she watched the servant trot down towards the pier with the letter in her hand. She smiled at her thoughts. After all, Ballymullan was on the mainland within easy reach of Dublin. There would be social calls, week-end trips and a liberal allowance. And Chris Nolan? She shuddered when she thought of his bald head and the noise he made in his throat when he was eating. But anything was better than Inverara in winter.

And perhaps the curate in Ballymullan. . . .

And Josephine smiled again.

XXVIII

The Struggle

THE SEA WAS DEAD CALM. THERE WAS NO WIND. The sun stood high in the heavens. Seamus O'Toole and Michael Halloran were coming from Kilmurrage to Rooruch in a new boat they had just bought. The fresh tar on the boat's canvas sides glistened in the sun, and the polished wooden lathes of the frame emitted a strong smell of pine. The two men were singing snatches of coarse songs as they rowed. They had drunk a lot of whiskey in Kilmurrage. They were both strong young men. Seamus O'Toole rowed in the prow. His cap resting crookedly on the back of his head, showed his white forehead above a ruddy face. His blue eyes were glassy with drink and there was a slight froth around the corners of his thick lips. Michael Halloran rowed in the stern. His bare head was shaped like a cone, shorn to the bone all round with a short glib hanging over the narrow forehead. Sweat discoloured the knees of his white frieze trousers. His shoulder blades twitched convulsively under his grey shirt as he lay forward over the oars and he kept hanging his head sideways, as if he were trying to hit his left knee.

They were passing Coillnamhan harbour about a

mile from the shore, when O'Toole stopped rowing suddenly and said, "Let us have a drink." "I'm satisfied," said Halloran, letting go his oars. The boat flopped ahead with a lapping sound on the eddies of her wake. O'Toole picked up a pint bottle of whiskey that rested on his waistcoat in the prow. He uncorked it and took a swig. The whiskey gurgled going down his throat. Then his lips left the neck of the bottle with a gasp and he passed it in silence to Halloran. Halloran took a long draught and passed it back. "That's enough for us," he said thickly. "Go to the devil," said O'Toole with a rough laugh and put the bottle to his lips again. Halloran turned round in his seat and snatched the bottle. O'Toole's teeth rasped against the rim as the bottle was wrenched from his mouth. Halloran swallowed his breath hurriedly and tried to put the bottle to his lips with his right hand. He was leaning backwards, his face to the sun, his left hand on the starboard gunwale.

O'Toole cursed, drew in a deep breath, and struck at Halloran's upturned face with his right fist. His upper lip contorted as he struck. He struck Halloran between the eyes. The bottle fell to the bottom of the boat, hit a round granite stone that lay there and broke into pieces. Halloran's head hit the

bottom of the boat with a hollow thud and rebounded as he clawed with his hands and legs. His bloodshot eyes glared and he shrieked as he struggled to his feet. O'Toole with his jaws wide open jumped to his feet too and snatched at his waistcoat. He pulled a knife from the pocket. He was opening it when he dropped it suddenly and whirled about. Halloran had yelled again. He was standing athwart his seat, the round stone in his left hand. He drew back his arm to take aim when the boat rolled to port, and he slipped. His right shin struck against the seat. In seizing the gunwales with both hands to steady himself the stone dropped into the sea. Its splash sounded loud in the silence. Hissing, they both stood upright, swaying gracefully with the rocking boat, as agile as acrobats in their drunken madness. They stared into one another's eyes for several seconds, their bodies twitching, their thighs taut. Each felt the other's breath hot on his face. Their breathing was loud. Each stood astride his seat.

Then the boat stopped rocking. With a roar they rushed at one another's throats. They met between the two seats, their feet against the sides, each clasping the other's throat. They stood cheek to cheek, breast to breast. They had moved so lightly that the boat did not rock. The two of

them close together looked like a mast. They stood still.

Then O'Toole raised his left leg and hit Halloran in the stomach. Halloran yelled and doubled up. The boat rocked as O'Toole pressed forward and the two of them tumbled across the second seat, Halloran beneath, O'Toole sprawling on top, his hands still gripping Halloran's throat. Then Halloran heaved and struggled sideways to his knees. He threw O'Toole's legs over the port gunwale. The boat canted ominously to port. The port gunwale was almost under water. They both shrieked. Halloran's body bounded off the boat's bottom as he wrenched himself to starboard and wound his legs about the seat. The boat rocked from side to side madly. Then O'Toole tried to lift his legs on board. They were almost on board when Halloran grasped at his head and seized his ears. They swung out again with a swish. The boat rolled with them, paused for a moment with the gunwale at the water's edge and then it toppled over with a swoop. There was a muffled yell as the two men disappeared beneath the black dome of tarred canvas, Halloran's legs clinging like a vice to the seat, O'Toole's hands gripping Halloran's throat.

For half a minute the boat hopped restlessly. There was a rustling noise of something splashing in water.

Then all was still. The sun glistened on the tarred bottom of the boat. A cap floated near.

Then the upturned boat began to drift slowly westwards.

XXIX

Wolf Lanigan's Death

IT WAS A FROSTY JANUARY NIGHT ABOUT TEN o'clock. A large barge drawn by two horses was coming slowly down the Canal nearing its destination at Portobello Bridge, Dublin. There was no moon, but now and again glaring lights from the tramcars that rattled over the Bridge lit up the dark waters of the Canal, the grey bulk of the barge, the taut rope, the narrow gravel path and the two lean horses walking slowly in single file with their heads drooping.

Then as the barge drew closer to the bank, Wolf Lanigan raised his head and shoulders behind the windlass in the bows and looked about him cautiously. "Jump, towny," cried the helmsman in a whisper. Wolf stood up suddenly, jumped on to the tarpaulin that covered the cargo, stooped and took a flying leap to the bank. He landed on his hands and knees, jumped to his feet, waved his hand to the barge and vaulted over the low concrete wall into the street beyond. He landed ankle deep in the mud beside the wall with a loud thud. The noise made him stiffen with his hands and back gripping the concrete wall. He listened for several seconds without breathing. Not a sound in the dark street but

the squelching of the displaced mud. He ran crouching across the street and into a dark alleyway between two houses. At the far end there was a heap of rubbish and an upturned cart in a little wooden shed. He went on his hands and knees in the shed behind the cart, took an electric torch from the pocket of his loose raincoat and flashed it about. There was nothing but a heap of straw, a torn black hat lying in a corner, and an empty sack.

He switched off the torch and placed it in the cart. Then he took off his raincoat, a blue serge coat and a leather jacket. Lying between his shoulder blades on his white shirt was a Colt automatic pistol, bound by leather thongs around his neck and waist.

He loosed the thongs, placed the pistol in the cart, and dressed hurriedly. Then he switched on the torch again and placed it in the cart with the light towards him. He took the pistol, released the cartridge case, emptied the cartridges, wiped each one with a handkerchief, notched their heads with a clasp knife, returned them to the case and returned the case to the pistol. Then he switched off the light, put it in his pocket and jumped to his feet. He put the pistol in his left breast pocket, and with right hand on the butt he walked back into the street with stooping shoulders.

He crossed Dublin without stopping, following

dark side streets, going under arches and through by-lanes. He passed over the Liffey at Butt Bridge and then hurried through a maze of slum streets until he reached Dublin's brothel quarter, north of Amiens Street. There he slackened his pace and went cautiously, stopping at every corner and convulsively pressing the butt of his pistol when anybody passed. At last he crossed a waste patch of ground that was strewn with bricks, heaps of debris and old pots and he came to the corner of Divis Street.

Peering around the corner of a deserted house at the end of the street a blaze of light struck him, running low to the ground in parallel lines until it ended in a dark lane at the far end. The light streamed from the open doorways of the two-storied brothels, shebeens, and dens of criminals on either side, while the second stories were in darkness, or with only a dim light showing through heavy blinds. The street was crowded with men and women, walking up and down and standing at the doorways, some drunk, staggering and quarrelling, others singing with clasped hands, others walking silently in couples with the measured tread of policemen. Strains of music and the sound of wild singing and still wilder laughter rose from the street in a strange inhuman melancholy roar to the still sky overhead. And yet

in spite of the noise there seemed to be a deadly silence. The music, the singing, the banging of doors, the obscene curses, the drunken lascivious laughter came like a casual murmur heard from the bottom of a dark abyss.

The Wolf waited over five minutes, motionless, with his body pressed against the brick wall, watching the street. He could not move while those silent couples were pacing up and down steadily, seemingly intent on nothing but their thoughts. He knew their eyes would catch him slinking past, that guns would flash out, and deep voices bellow out "hands up!" . . .

Then from the far end a young woman came staggering down the street, hanging on the arm of a young man. Her long, black hair flowed down about her shoulders. A loose dressing-gown was open to below her breasts. She laughed hysterically as she tried to brandish a bottle over her head. Then suddenly another woman rushed out at her from an open doorway. "Let him go, you b–, he's mine." A shriek, a sudden rush and the two women were at one another's throats. The whole street gathered around, shouting. "Now's my chance," muttered the Wolf.

He darted along the side of the street, passed the crowd and dived into a dark doorway at the far end.

On tiptoe he passed a door on the right of the hall. Sounds of drunken revelry came through the door, sounds packed close together as of a pot boiling furiously. In the hall there was the silence and darkness of death. The Wolf drew his pistol and groped for the wall with his left hand. He couldn't see his hand. At last he found the wall. He slid along it, holding the pistol behind him, facing the street. His foot came in contact with a stairway. Noiselessly he mounted step after step, sideways, with the pistol behind. He reached a landing. The roof was so low that he had to stoop. Opposite him there was a gleam of light coming through the keyhole of a door. Catlike, lifting each foot carefully and planting it flat, he reached the door. He put his ear to the keyhole and listened. Then he knocked quietly, two double knocks. There was a noise of a bed creaking and then of slippers shuffling along a boarded floor. The door opened slightly and a woman's head appeared. "Rosie," hissed the Wolf.

"God!" ejaculated the woman, stepping back.

The Wolf darted in after her and closed the door gently and put his back to it. Turning the key with one hand, with his gun levelled, his eyes darted around the room. It was bare, low roofed, garret-like, with a table in the centre of the bare boarded floor. On the table was a white cloth with dirty

crockery in a pile at one end. In the corner was a wide bed with the yellow quilt crushed, evidently where the woman had been lying on top of it. A coal fire burned brightly in the open grate. A lamp with a broken chimney hung on a nail on the wall. Not a sound was heard in the room but the lazy crackling of the fire and the distant heavy murmur from the street coming through the heavy blinds on the window. The air was heavy and thick.

The Wolf stood with his legs wide apart, crouching forward from the hips. His sallow face was contorted with excitement. A thick growth of black beard covered his square jaws and his lips. There was a patch of clotted blood over his right eye. His boots were caked with mud and there was a large rent in his right trouser leg below the raincoat, that covered his body from there to the throat. A grey tweed cap was pulled far down over his head. A bony hand covered with dirt gripped the pistol close to his hip. He stood squat, broad-shouldered, leaning forward, as if he were ready to jump through the window at the slightest sound.

The woman stood by the table staring at him with an expression of horror on her pale beautiful face. It was deadly pale. Even the open lips were pale and her large eyes were glassy and lifeless. A long

plait of black hair was hanging over her right shoulder, trailing down the breast of her loose grey dressing-gown. Her hands clutched at the end of the plait. Her bare feet were stuck into a pair of heelless slippers. She stood, tall and motionless, staring wildly and intently at the Wolf's face, with compressed lips, as if hypnotized.

For several seconds they stood that way, the two of them, in the silent room. Then suddenly the Wolf spoke.

"Anybody been here?" His voice came in a hoarse, cracked whisper, the voice of a man who has spent sleepless nights in the winter air.

The woman tried to speak, swallowed something and shook her head.

"What the h-ll is the matter with ye?" hissed the Wolf through his yellow teeth. "Aren't ye glad to see me? Eh! Has anybody been here? Ye know who I mean?"

He advanced towards her noiselessly and stood with the muzzle of his pistol pointed within an inch of her breast. But the woman, without a movement of her body and without taking her eyes from his face, just shook her head once more. Then she gasped, shivered, put her right hand to her forehead, and sank to a chair by the table, still looking at the Wolf, as if drawn by a magnet.

"Afraid of me? Eh?" said the Wolf opening his mouth wide and bursting into a noiseless laugh. His head and shoulders shook, but he made no sound. "Do I look funny? Eh? Come on, move, an' get me somethin' t' eat. I'm starved. D'ye hear? Didn't eat this two days. Move, blast ye."

He watched the woman get to her feet and walk to the cupboard near the fireplace. Then he moved on the flat of his feet to a chair by the table facing the door. He laid the pistol in front of him. The woman was putting a kettle on the fire.

"Don't mind that kettle, I tell ye," he said. "Give me somethin' t' eat. I don't want any tea. Haven't ye got any grub?"

Without a word she dropped the kettle and went back again to the cupboard. The Wolf took off his cap. His forehead was bald and sloped straight back from the eyes. There was another large patch of congealed blood where the bald spot met the hair near the top of his skull. He put his fingers to it and ground his teeth with pain. The woman put a pork pie, bread, butter and milk on the table. She moved mechanically, using only one hand, as if driven by an alien will to do something hateful. And all the time her lifeless eyes strayed to the Wolf's face. Without looking at her the Wolf began to eat ravenously. Every time a shout came from the

street, he started, looked around wildly and grabbed his pistol. The woman stood by the fireplace, with her hands folded on her breast, motionless, her eyes fixed on his face.

Then he finished eating, licked his fingers and looked at the woman. His small grey eyes roamed over her face and his under lip protruded.

"Why the h-ll don't ye say somethin'?" he snarled. "Ye heard about the racket in Mullingar, didn't ye?"

The woman's lips quivered, but she didn't speak. He jumped up, and gripped her by the right shoulder and pointed the gun at her breast.

"Listen to what I'm goin' to tell ye. I'm goin' to tell ye somethin' that'll wake ye up, dosey. D'ye know where I went four days ago? Eh? Well, me an' Chris Moloney an' the Bull Kelly went to raid a bank in Mullingar. The cops followed us from here, see? Somebody gev the game away. Chris an' the Bull got pinched, an' I'd have got pinched too, only I plugged a cop. I plugged a man, Rosie, d'ye hear? Shot him dead. Been two days comin' down in a canal boat. I'm wanted for murder, d'ye hear?"

The woman nodded her head several times and pointed to a newspaper that lay in the coal-scuttle. The Wolf darted over and picked it

up. On the front page in large headlines it ran:

MULLINGAR BANK HELD UP
DETECTIVE SERGEANT CARNEY SHOT DEAD.

And underneath was the Wolf's photograph.

The Wolf swore softly, crushed the paper into a ball and stamped on it. Then he turned once more to the woman. His nostrils were expanding and contracting.

"Listen. They aren't goin' to get me by – " He pulled out the cartridge case from the pistol. "They are all dum-dum. An' one is for mesel' and another for you. See? The rest is for the gang that comes to take me. Un'erstan'?"

There were beads of sweat on his swarthy forehead. The woman never moved or spoke. But her eyes became larger and the skin around her lips tightened. Swearing frightfully the Wolf took a bottle of whiskey from the cupboard and held it up to the light. It was nearly full. He wrenched out the cork with his teeth and drank deeply. Then he sat down again at the table facing the door, his left hand clutching the bottle, his right on his pistol butt. The woman drew a chair to the fire and sat down, still watching him.

The Wolf began to drink, starting at every noise; and between drinks he stared at the table, his eyes

narrowed, his forehead wrinkled into deep furrows, as if his brain were struggling with some intricate problem. The silence in the room was intense. Then gradually the Wolf's face relaxed. He began to move his limbs and nod his head. Then he struck the table with his fist, put the bottle to his head and emptied it and got to his feet. His body swayed slightly and there was a slight mist before his eyes. With his foot he drew his chair beside the woman's. He was careless now about making a noise. He sat down with a flop. He still had the gun in his hand. He put his arm around her waist. She looked into the fire and shivered.

"Say, Rosie." His voice was loud and hoarse and there was an attempt at merriment in it. "Be nice to me. Won't ye? Ain't I been a good pal to ye? Eh? Be the lumpin' Moses didn't I pick ye up in O'Connell Street, half starved, after that sojer friend o' yours deserted ye? Amn't I after keepin' ye here two months, an' ye never had to go out once an' bring in any money same as any other girl. Eh? Ain't ye goin' to kiss me, Rosie?"

The woman never moved. He staggered against her and pressed his lips to her white cheek. She shuddered.

"Divil take ye. Yer like a dead thing. Is it how ye think I haven't got any money?" He fumbled at his

shirt and pulled out a wad of bank-notes tied with a string. "There's three hundred there. See? It takes the Wolf to get away with 'em. See? We're goin' to have a good time on them, Rosie. Me an' you, Rosie. See? Soon as these cops are off the hunt, we'll ship across t' England. See? They ain't goin' to get me. See?" He jumped to his feet, suddenly furious. "Who's goin' to get me?" His voice came like a hiss between his teeth. Then he growled like a wild animal and stalked about the room with his gun levelled. "See? I'm the Wolf Lanigan. The Wolf. D'ye hear?"

Suddenly he staggered and put his hand to his head.

"Blast it, my head is goin' round. Must have a sleep." He moved over to the woman and whispered, "Rosie, I'm goin' to lie down. See? You keep watch."

He tumbled on to the bed and lay on his back with the pistol in his right hand across his chest. The woman's eyes were fixed on the fire. She sat immovable. The Wolf's eyes began to shut, but as soon as a noise came from outside, he started up and grabbed his pistol. Then gradually a weariness seized his limbs. They became listless. The weariness crept up into his head. His eyes shut. His mouth fell open. The hand slipped off the butt

of the pistol. He began to snore. He was asleep.

Then slowly the woman turned her head around towards the bed and looked at him. Her eyes opened wide like the eyes of a child brought face to face with something strange and tremendous. Gradually a look of wonder spread over her face. Her lips were parted, showing her white teeth. She stood up with her hands down by her sides. The dressing-gown slipped from her shoulders. Mechanically she slipped her hands from the sleeves and let it fall to the ground. She stood in her nightdress, her hair plaited, white like an apparition. She walked over to the bed, moving straight and stiff. She stood over the bed looking down at the Wolf's face.

Then a strange, ghastly smile crept over her lips and cheeks without touching the eyes. The eyes became cold and glassy; two large discs lit with an immeasurable hatred, while her lips smiled. Her right hand moved forward slowly until it reached the pistol. Slowly the fingers crept around the butt. Then the smile faded from her lips. Her eyeballs started from the sockets. Her teeth bared. She drew in a deep breath, pressed the pistol to the Wolf's chest and pressed the trigger.

There was a deafening roar as bullet after bullet crashed through the sleeper's breast. Then in the silence that followed, the rattling of the window, the

fragments of the lamp falling to the floor sounded like the dying echo of a thunder-clap. The woman turned, dropped the smoking pistol to the floor and burst into a wild shriek of insane laughter. Then there was silence again. Little clouds of smoke roamed about the ceiling. The figure on the bed was still.

XXX

The Black Bullock

He was two years old when he came to Inverara. But he had been hungry all his life and he was no bigger than a donkey. His owner was a boatman on the mainland opposite Inverara and he had bought the black bullock for ten shillings when the bullock was a week old. Its mother had died of the colic or something (the poor widow who owned her said it was the Evil Eye). But the boatman had no land and the bullock grew up about the cabin, more accustomed to potato skins and nettles than to hay or clover or plain grass. By day he wandered around the little fishing hamlet, rambling on the roadside, chased by dogs and pelted by children and by night he was tethered in his owner's kitchen to an iron hook in the wall by the back door. There was a deep groove around his neck where the rope rested, and the groove was deepest under his chin. For the lads of the village who visited his owner's cabin often amused themselves at night when the boatman was not looking by holding a potato in front of the bullock's mouth and retreating with it as the bullock strained after it moaning with hunger. Little boys amused themselves by riding him and sticking thistle heads in the end of his tail that only

reached half-way down his legs. Yet he was by nature so healthy that his temper never soured under this ill-treatment and, in spite of hunger, his black hide was glossy and curly. He had no horns, and the tip of his skull where bullocks have horns was always caked with dried mud, for he was in the habit of playfully butting his head into the bog and wallowing like a wild one.

Then on the festival of the pagan god Crom Dubh in autumn his owner brought him to the island of Inverara to graze for the winter, in the hope that he would get fat, and be fit for sale in the following May. He gave him to a peasant named Jimmy Hernon of Coillnamhan. "Feed him well, Jimmy," he said, "and I'll bring you the best boatload of turf that was ever cut in a bog when I am taking him away next May Day." Hernon took off his hat, spat on both hands and swore by all the saints that he would keep the bullock's belly full if his own had to go empty. In the presence of the boatman he put the little black bullock to graze in a clover field with his own cow. "There you are," he said. "There isn't a man in Inverara would treat your bullock so well." And the boatman went away to the mainland highly pleased with the bargain he had made.

As soon as the little black bullock found himself loose in the luscious clover he began to eat raven-

ously, wagging his tail, shaking his head and snorting. When he began to eat his belly was so thin that one could transfix it with a knitting needle, but it rapidly filled out so that he looked like a little cask. He soon made friends with the cow, although at first she horned him away when he sniffed at her flanks, and they wandered up and down the field all night side by side, their coarse tongues making a noise like tearing silk as they chopped the clover. Then in the morning when the cow leaned over the gap chewing her cud and lowed now and again wanting to be milked, the little black bullock stood by, chewing his cud with his eyes half shut, perfectly content.

But Hernon came with his wife to milk the cow and began to swear ferociously when he saw the black bullock's rotund stomach. "I'll declare," he said with an oath, "that he'll eat three times as much as my cow, the miserable little wretch. Out he goes to the crag this very minute." And he drove the bullock from the clover field up a rocky lane to the cliff top, hammering him with a big stick, so that the bullock ran and stumbled and bellowed, wondering what was happening to him. Then Hernon put him to graze in a broad barren crag overlooking the sea and went away.

The bullock roamed about the crag for a long time,

scarcely able to make his way over the jagged rocks and pointed loose stones. Several times he tried to nibble at the stunted grass that grew in the tiny valleys, but the grass tasted too salt and sour. And the sea roared near him. And the crag was so high and exposed that it caught every breeze and gust of wind, so that he felt very miserable and was struck with terror. For he had always been used to living among people and within sight of houses and shelter. All day he never ate anything, even of the stunted grass that grew there, but spent most of the time circling the crag trying to find a way out. The fence was not very high and he might easily jump it or knock it down by thrusting his breast against it, but his terror was so acute that he was unable to muster up courage to do so. When he passed along the brink of the cliff overlooking the sea, where there was no fence, he was continually snorting and jumping sideways with fright.

Then night came and he had nowhere to take shelter from the bitter autumn wind that rose from the sea. Next morning his hide was wet with dew and sea froth and his belly was as empty as it had been when he landed in Inverara. As day advanced the sun shone brightly, warming him, so he capered about nibbling and felt fairly comfortable, though his hoofs were sore from treading the sharp rocks.

The best grass grew in the deep crevices in the rocks and he had to scramble over the most difficult ground to reach it, sometimes even going on his knees and straining his neck down into the holes. When he had eaten sufficient he wanted to drink, and that too was difficult, for the little pools were almost dry and it was only after visiting six of them, scattered at long intervals, that he was satisfied.

He spent a week that way without seeing a soul, and every day he became hungrier, more thirsty and miserable. Then three wandering goats came on to his crag and stayed the day prancing about the cliff top. He tried to make friends with them, but when he came near them and stretched out his head and sniffed, they stamped and snorted and ran away. And in the evening they departed eastwards, jumping a low part of the fence quite easily. He stood looking over the fence where they had leaped a long time, lowing after them until they disappeared. Then, seized with fury, he pushed against the fence, knocked off a few stones and scrambled through the gap in a heap to the other side.

With his tail in the air he ran along in the direction the goats had gone until he came to a lane. There he met a donkey with a young foal. He nestled up to the donkey, but the donkey kicked him in the belly and then bared her teeth and tried to bite him. So

he wandered on, until he saw a village ahead of him.

When he saw the houses and the people he thought he was home again. He began to low with joy and, tossing his head, he trotted along snorting playfully. But straying round the village smelling at gates and dunghills he was chased by dogs, and peasant women ran out and threw stones at him, so that he retired miserably to a waste plot at the back of a barn and lay down, very weary of life. For these people regarded him as a wild beast and would not let him come near them.

Then two stray dogs discovered him and chased him down to the village cross-roads where a number of young men were loafing. The young men, bored for want of amusement, herded him into a corner and tied a tin kettle to his short tail. Then they beat him and shouted "Fe-och, fe-och" and turned him out into the road again. The tin kettle just tipped the ground, and at every step the bullock took it clattered against his heels.

He began to trot in order to get away from it. But the more he trotted the greater was the noise it made and it hit his heels all the harder. Then he got mad, lashed out with his hind legs and broke into a gallop. The dogs barked and ran alongside him, biting at his mouth and his flanks. The men yelled and urged on the dogs. The bullock ran on and on

frothing at the mouth until he reached a gap in the road fence that led into a crag. He rushed through the gap and on to the crag. But the kettle made a greater noise on the limestone crag and the dogs were better able to bite him, since he had to go slower. So he began to bellow and jumped headlong down into a little glen. It was but ten feet of a fall, but his hind hoof caught in a crevice as he jumped, and he fell on his back.

When Hernon found him his spine was broken, so he had to slaughter him.

XXXI

The Bladder

THE SCHOOLMASTER WAS A DISAGREEABLE MAN. He was always interfering in other people's business and giving advice about things of which he knew nothing. So that, although he was an excellent teacher, he was disliked in the island of Inverara. Somehow or other everything he said or did was aggressive and insulting. He walked with his head thrown back on his fat, red neck, that bulged in little waves over the collar of his coat, and with his brown beard thrusting out in front of his face. He always wore grey tweeds and a little grey cap that was pulled so far down over his forehead that a little patch of his baldness could be seen at the rear of his skull. Then when he spoke to any one he kept one hand in his pocket, jingling his money, and stroked his beard with the other. He had a great deep voice, slow and pompous. "Haw," he would say, somewhere down in his throat, "what did I tell you? Why didn't you take my advice?"

At lunch time he walked up and down the road in front of his school with his lunch on his right palm on a piece of newspaper, and a clasp-knife in the other hand, eating bread and cheese. The cheese was always very high, and he had a horrid way of

putting a piece between his thick red lips and then making a sucking sound. And he did that, he told the police sergeant, to persuade the islanders that bread and cheese was the healthiest and cheapest diet for a midday meal.

He was always telling the peasants that they didn't till the land properly or look after their cattle properly, and the fishermen that their nets were not the correct depth or length. In the same manner he inveighed against the unhealthy food the people used – tea, poor American flour, potatoes, and salt fish. When John Feeney's son Brian had the influenza the schoolmaster met John one night and said, "What are you feeding your son with?" Feeney scratched his head and said, "Faith, I'm giving him the best o' nourishment. Pancakes." "You're a fool, Feeney," said the schoolmaster in his bass voice; "give him oatmeal porridge, man." Then young Feeney's influenza turned into consumption, and the boy died. At the funeral the schoolmaster caught Feeney by the shoulder and bawled into his ear, "What did I tell you? Why didn't you take my advice?"

After his wife died of the delirium tremens he began a campaign against intoxicating liquor. He would talk for hours in front of the church on Sunday after Mass, reading statistics to show how drink

beggared the country and filled the lunatic asylums. "And tobacco is nearly as bad," he would say. "Fancy a sane man making a chimney of his mouth and setting fire to his purse."

Then one December he bought a heifer from Jim Delaney, and, since he had no land, he sent the heifer to graze on Michael Derrane's land at so much a month. The heifer was in calf when he bought her, and she was a good-looking, healthy beast of a dark red colour with a white patch underneath her stomach. "Now we'll see how he gets on," said the peasants, winking at one another.

The cow spent the winter in those fields Derrane had beneath the road half a mile west of the church, and all through the winter she was the main topic of conversation among the peasants in the west of the island. People were always leaning over the fence on the roadside, looking at her. Every evening after closing the school the schoolmaster went to visit her. He drove her around the field, examined her droppings and the water-tub. Then he would stoop down and look at her udder to see if she was beginning to gather milk, fully three months before she was due to calve. He became unbearable in his conversation, boasting about the cow. "Look at her," he would say. "I am a schoolmaster. I grow my own potatoes, cabbages, onions, and parsnips in my garden. Now

I'm going to have my own milk. That's what comes of being educated and being able to use the brains that the Lord gave me." And he spent an amount of money on agricultural periodicals dealing with the breeding and treatment of cattle.

When the cow was due to calve he had relays of the school-children watching her by day, and he hired Tom Finnigan, the labourer, to watch her at night. Every evening he gave the cow a hot drink. "Phew," said the peasants, "be Saint Michael that cow will beggar him. It's a true story. Put a beggar on horseback."

The cow went twelve days over her time, and then on a Friday night just before dawn she had a speckled calf. Tom Finnigan and the schoolmaster were there, and the schoolmaster was as proud as if the calf were his firstborn child instead of a little speckled beast that sprawled about on the grass, trying to stand up. "You wait, Tom," said the schoolmaster, "that will be the best bullock in the island in two years' time." Then he went home to mix another drink for the cow and left Tom to watch her.

But in their excitement they had forgotten to empty the water-tub. Tom Finnigan had been up three nights, and overcome with weariness he fell asleep sitting under the fence, and in that condition the schoolmaster found him on his return. When

Tom opened his eyes there was the schoolmaster showering blows on him and yelling like a madman. "Scoundrel, scoundrel, I'll have the law of you." "Yer honour," began Tom, jumping to his feet. Then he stopped and opened his mouth. The cow was standing in the middle of the field with her neck stretched low to the ground and her open mouth in the air. One side of her was flat and the other side swollen like a bladder. She had emptied the water-tub.

In a short while a crowd gathered and men offered advice, but the schoolmaster paid no heed to anyone. He kept roaring, "Scoundrel, scoundrel!" and in his shirt sleeves, with froth on his beard, he rubbed and rubbed at the cow's expanded side until the red hair was coming off in handfuls. For all that, he might as well be rubbing a mountain in the hope of flattening it out. The cow began to bellow and stagger about.

At last the peasants got mad with him and said that if he didn't let them treat the cow in the proper manner they would flay him within an inch of his life. "What good can you do her, you scoundrels?" yelled the schoolmaster. "Give her whiskey," roared the peasants. The schoolmaster was terrified out of his wits and told them to go and get whiskey. A lad brought a pint. They seized the cow and poured it

down her throat. Soon she began to toss her head and run about breaking wind. That evening she was as well as ever.

But the schoolmaster sold her and the calf a month later to Mick Grealish the blacksmith. Since then he never talks of cattle or farming. Neither does he give anybody advice. But the peasants have nicknamed him "The Bladder."

XXXII

Going Into Exile

PATRICK FEENEY'S CABIN WAS CROWDED WITH people. In the large kitchen men, women, and children lined the walls, three deep in places, sitting on forms, chairs, stools, and on one another's knees. On the cement floor three couples were dancing a jig and raising a quantity of dust, which was, however, soon sucked up the chimney by the huge turf fire that blazed on the hearth. The only clear space in the kitchen was the corner to the left of the fireplace, where Pat Mullaney sat on a yellow chair, with his right ankle resting on his left knee, a spotted red handkerchief on his head that reeked with perspiration, and his red face contorting as he played a tattered old accordion. One door was shut and the tins hanging on it gleamed in the firelight. The opposite door was open and over the heads of the small boys that crowded in it and outside it, peering in at the dancing couples in the kitchen, a starry June sky was visible and, beneath the sky, shadowy grey crags and misty, whitish fields lay motionless, still and sombre. There was a deep, calm silence outside the cabin and within the cabin, in spite of the music and dancing in the kitchen and the singing in the little room to the left, where Patrick Feeney's

eldest son Michael sat on the bed with three other young men, there was a haunting melancholy in the air.

The people were dancing, laughing and singing with a certain forced and boisterous gaiety that failed to hide from them the real cause of their being there, dancing, singing and laughing. For the dance was on account of Patrick Feeney's two children, Mary and Michael, who were going to the United States on the following morning.

Feeney himself, a black-bearded, red-faced, middle-aged peasant, with white ivory buttons on his blue frieze shirt and his hands stuck in his leather waist belt, wandered restlessly about the kitchen, urging the people to sing and dance, while his mind was in agony all the time, thinking that on the following day he would lose his two eldest children, never to see them again perhaps. He kept talking to everybody about amusing things, shouted at the dancers and behaved in a boisterous and abandoned manner. But every now and then he had to leave the kitchen, under the pretence of going to the pigsty to look at a young pig that was supposed to be ill. He would stand, however, upright against his gable and look gloomily at some star or other, while his mind struggled with vague and peculiar ideas that wandered about in it. He could make nothing at all of his

thoughts, but a lump always came up his throat, and he shivered, although the night was warm.

Then he would sigh and say with a contraction of his neck: "Oh, it's a queer world this and no doubt about it. So it is." Then he would go back to the cabin again and begin to urge on the dance, laughing, shouting and stamping on the floor.

Towards dawn, when the floor was crowded with couples, arranged in fours, stamping on the floor and going to and fro, dancing the "Walls of Limerick," Feeney was going out to the gable when his son Michael followed him out. The two of them walked side by side about the yard over the grey sea pebbles that had been strewn there the previous day. They walked in silence and yawned without need, pretending to be taking the air. But each of them was very excited. Michael was taller than his father and not so thickly built, but the shabby blue serge suit that he had bought for going to America was too narrow for his broad shoulders and the coat was too wide around the waist. He moved clumsily in it and his hands appeared altogether too bony and big and red, and he didn't know what to do with them. During his twenty-one years of life he had never worn anything other than the homespun clothes of Inverara, and the shop-made clothes appeared as strange to him and as uncomfortable as a dress suit worn by a

man working in a sewer. His face was flushed a bright red and his blue eyes shone with excitement. Now and again he wiped the perspiration from his forehead with the lining of his grey tweed cap.

At last Patrick Feeney reached his usual position at the gable end. He halted, balanced himself on his heels with his hands in his waist belt, coughed and said, "It's going to be a warm day." The son came up beside him, folded his arms and leaned his right shoulder against the gable.

"It was kind of Uncle Ned to lend the money for the dance, father," he said. "I'd hate to think that we'd have to go without something or other, just the same as everybody else has. I'll send you that money the very first money I earn, father . . . even before I pay Aunt Mary for my passage money. I should have all that money paid off in four months, and then I'll have some more money to send you by Christmas."

And Michael felt very strong and manly recounting what he was going to do when he got to Boston, Massachusetts. He told himself that with his great strength he would earn a great deal of money. Conscious of his youth and his strength and lusting for adventurous life, for the moment he forgot the ache in his heart that the thought of leaving his father inspired in him.

The father was silent for some time. He was looking at the sky with his lower lip hanging, thinking of nothing. At last he sighed as a memory struck him. "What is it?" said the son. "Don't weaken, for God's sake. You will only make it hard for me." "Fooh!" said the father suddenly with pretended gruffness. "Who is weakening? I'm afraid that your new clothes make you impudent." Then he was silent for a moment and continued in a low voice: "I was thinking of that potato field you sowed alone last spring the time I had the influenza. I never set eyes on the man that could do it better. It's a cruel world that takes you away from the land that God made you for."

"Oh, what are you talking about, father?" said Michael irritably. "Sure what did anybody ever get out of the land but poverty and hard work and potatoes and salt?"

"Ah yes," said the father with a sigh, "but it's your own, the land, and over there" – he waved his hand at the western sky – "you'll be giving your sweat to some other man's land, or what's equal to it."

" Indeed," muttered Michael, looking at the ground with a melancholy expression in his eyes, "it's poor encouragement you are giving me."

They stood in silence fully five minutes. Each hungered to embrace the other, to cry, to beat the

air, to scream with excess of sorrow. But they stood silent and sombre, like nature about them, hugging their woe. Then they went back to the cabin. Michael went into the little room to the left of the kitchen, to the three young men who fished in the same curragh with him and were his bosom friends. The father walked into the large bedroom to the right of the kitchen.

The large bedroom was also crowded with people. A large table was laid for tea in the centre of the room and about a dozen young men were sitting at it, drinking tea and eating buttered raisin cake. Mrs. Feeney was bustling about the table, serving the food and urging them to eat. She was assisted by her two younger daughters and by another woman, a relative of her own. Her eldest daughter Mary, who was going to the United States that day, was sitting on the edge of the bed with several other young women. The bed was a large four poster bed with a deal canopy over it, painted red, and the young women were huddled together on it. So that there must have been about a dozen of them there. They were Mary Feeney's particular friends, and they stayed with her in that uncomfortable position just to show how much they liked her. It was a custom.

Mary herself sat on the edge of the bed with her

legs dangling. She was a pretty, dark-haired girl of nineteen, with dimpled, plump, red cheeks and ruminative brown eyes that seemed to cause little wrinkles to come and go in her little low forehead. Her nose was soft and small and rounded. Her mouth was small and the lips were red and open. Beneath her white blouse that was frilled at the neck and her navy blue skirt that outlined her limbs as she sat on the edge of the bed, her body was plump, soft, well-moulded and in some manner exuded a feeling of freshness and innocence. So that she seemed to have been born to be fondled and admired in luxurious surroundings instead of having been born a peasant's daughter, who had to go to the United States that day to work as a servant or maybe in a factory.

And as she sat on the edge of the bed crushing her little handkerchief between her palms, she kept thinking feverishly of the United States, at one moment with fear and loathing, at the next with desire and longing. Unlike her brother she did not think of the work she was going to do or the money that she was going to earn. Other things troubled her, things of which she was half ashamed, half afraid, thoughts of love and of foreign men and of clothes and of houses where there were more than three rooms and where people ate meat every day.

She was fond of life, and several young men among the local gentry had admired her in Inverara. But . . .

She happened to look up and she caught her father's eyes as he stood silently by the window with his hands stuck in his waist belt. His eyes rested on hers for a moment and then he dropped them without smiling, and with his lips compressed he walked down into the kitchen. She shuddered slightly. She was a little afraid of her father, although she knew that he loved her very much and he was very kind to her. But the winter before he had whipped her with a dried willow rod, when he caught her one evening behind Tim Hernon's cabin after nightfall, with Tim Hernon's son Bartly's arms around her waist and he kissing her. Ever since, she always shivered slightly when her father touched her or spoke to her. "Oho!" said an old peasant who sat at the table with a saucer full of tea in his hand and his grey flannel shirt open at his thin, hairy, wrinkled neck. "Oho! indeed, but it's a disgrace to the island of Inverara to let such a beautiful woman as your daughter go away, Mrs. Feeney. If I were a young man, I'll be flayed alive if I'd let her go."

There was a laugh and some of the women on the bed, said: "Bad cess to you, Patsy Coyne, if you haven't too much impudence, it's a caution." But

the laugh soon died. The young men sitting at the table felt embarrassed and kept looking at one another sheepishly, as if each tried to find out if the others were in love with Mary Feeney.

"Oh, well, God is good," said Mrs. Feeney, as she wiped her lips with the tip of her bright, clean, check apron. "What will be must be, and sure there is hope from the sea, but there is no hope from the grave. It is sad and the poor have to suffer, but . . ." Mrs. Feeney stopped suddenly, aware that all these platitudes meant nothing whatsoever. Like her husband she was unable to think intelligibly about her two children going away. Whenever the reality of their going away, maybe for ever, three thousand miles into a vast unknown world, came before her mind, it seemed that a thin bar of some hard metal thrust itself forward from her brain and rested behind the wall of her forehead. So that almost immediately she became stupidly conscious of the pain caused by the imaginary bar of metal and she forgot the dread prospect of her children going away. But her mind grappled with the things about her busily and efficiently, with the preparation of food, with the entertaining of her guests, with the numerous little things that have to be done in a house where there is a party and which only a woman can do properly. These little things, in a

manner, saved her, for the moment at least, from bursting into tears whenever she looked at her daughter and whenever she thought of her son, whom she loved most of all her children, because perhaps she nearly died giving birth to him and he had been very delicate until he was twelve years old. So she laughed down in her breast a funny laugh she had that made her heave, where her check apron rose out from the waist band in a deep curve. "A person begins to talk," she said with a shrug of her shoulders sideways, "and then a person says foolish things."

"That's true," said the old peasant, noisily pouring more tea from his cup to his saucer.

But Mary knew by her mother laughing that way that she was very near being hysterical. She always laughed that way before she had one of her fits of hysterics. And Mary's heart stopped beating suddenly and then began again at an awful rate as her eyes became acutely conscious of her mother's body, the rotund, short body with the wonderful mass of fair hair growing grey at the temples and the fair face with the soft liquid brown eyes, that grew hard and piercing for a moment as they looked at a thing and then grew soft and liquid again, and the thin-lipped small mouth with the beautiful white teeth and the deep perpendicular grooves in the upper lip

and the tremor that always came in the corner of the mouth, with love, when she looked at her children. Mary became acutely conscious of all these little points, as well as of the little black spot that was on her left breast below the nipple and the swelling that came now and again in her legs and caused her to have hysterics and would one day cause her death. And she was stricken with horror at the thought of leaving her mother and at the selfishness of her thoughts. She had never been prone to thinking of anything important but now, somehow for a moment, she had a glimpse of her mother's life that made her shiver and hate herself as a cruel, heartless, lazy, selfish wretch. Her mother's life loomed up before her eyes, a life of continual misery and suffering, hard work, birth pangs, sickness and again hard work and hunger and anxiety. It loomed up and then it fled again, a little mist came before her eyes and she jumped down from the bed, with the jaunty twirl of her head that was her habit when she set her body in motion.

"Sit down for a while, mother," she whispered, toying with one of the black ivory buttons on her mother's brown bodice. "I'll look after the table."

"No, no," murmured the mother with a shake of her whole body, "I'm not a bit tired. Sit down, my treasure. You have a long way to travel to-day."

And Mary sighed and went back to the bed again.

At last somebody said: "It's broad daylight." And immediately everybody looked out and said: "So it is, and may God be praised." The change from the starry night to the grey, sharp dawn was hard to notice until it had arrived. People looked out and saw the morning light sneaking over the crags silently, along the ground, pushing the mist banks upwards. The stars were growing dim. A long way off invisible sparrows were chirping in their ivied perch in some distant hill or other. Another day had arrived and even as the people looked at it, yawned and began to search for their hats, caps and shawls preparing to go home, the day grew and spread its light and made things move and give voice. Cocks crew, blackbirds carolled, a dog let loose from a cabin by an early riser chased madly after an imaginary robber, barking as if his tail were on fire. The people said good-bye and began to stream forth from Feeney's cabin. They were going to their homes to see to the morning's work before going to Kilmurrage to see the emigrants off on the steamer to the mainland. Soon the cabin was empty except for the family.

All the family gathered into the kitchen and stood about for some minutes talking sleepily of the dance and of the people who had been present. Mrs.

Feeney tried to persuade everybody to go to bed, but everybody refused. It was four o'clock and Michael and Mary would have to set out for Kilmurrage at nine. So tea was made and they all sat about for an hour drinking it and eating raisin cake and talking. They only talked of the dance and of the people who had been present.

There were eight of them there, the father and mother and six children. The youngest child was Thomas, a thin boy of twelve, whose lungs made a singing sound every time he breathed. The next was Bridget, a girl of fourteen, with dancing eyes and a habit of shaking her short golden curls every now and then for no apparent reason. Then there were the twins, Julia and Margaret, quiet, rather stupid, flat-faced girls of sixteen. Both their upper front teeth protruded slightly and they were both great workers and very obedient to their mother. They were all sitting at the table, having just finished a third large pot of tea, when suddenly the mother hastily gulped down the remainder of the tea in her cup, dropped the cup with a clatter to her saucer and sobbed once through her nose.

"Now mother," said Michael sternly, "what's the good of this work?"

"No, you are right, my pulse," she replied quietly. "Only I was just thinking how nice it is to sit here

surrounded by all my children, all my little birds in my nest, and then two of them going to fly away made me sad." And she laughed, pretending to treat it as a foolish joke.

"Oh, that be damned for a story," said the father, wiping his mouth on his sleeve; "there's work to be done. You Julia, go and get the horse. Margaret, you milk the cow and see that you give enough milk to the calf this morning." And he ordered everybody about as if it were an ordinary day of work.

But Michael and Mary had nothing to do and they sat about miserably conscious that they had cut adrift from the routine of their home life. They no longer had any place in it. In a few hours they would be homeless wanderers. Now that they were cut adrift from it, the poverty and sordidness of their home life appeared to them under the aspect of comfort and plenty.

So the morning passed until breakfast time at seven o'clock. The morning's work was finished and the family was gathered together again. The meal passed in a dead silence. Drowsy after the sleepless night and conscious that the parting would come in a few hours, nobody wanted to talk. Everybody had an egg for breakfast in honour of the occasion. Mrs. Feeney, after her usual habit, tried to give her egg first to Michael, then to Mary, and as each

refused it, she ate a little herself and gave the remainder to little Thomas who had the singing in his chest. Then the breakfast was cleared away. The father went to put the creels on the mare so as to take the luggage into Kilmurrage. Michael and Mary got the luggage ready and began to get dressed. The mother and the other children tidied up the house. People from the village began to come into the kitchen, as was customary, in order to accompany the emigrants from their home to Kilmurrage.

At last everything was ready. Mrs. Feeney had exhausted all excuses for moving about, engaged on trivial tasks. She had to go into the big bedroom where Mary was putting on her new hat. The mother sat on a chair by the window, her face contorting on account of the flood of tears she was keeping back. Michael moved about the room uneasily, his two hands knotting a big red handkerchief behind his back. Mary twisted about in front of the mirror that hung over the black wooden mantelpiece. She was spending a long time with the hat. It was the first one she had ever worn, but it fitted her beautifully, and it was in excellent taste. It was given to her by the schoolmistress, who was very fond of her, and she herself had taken it in a little. She had an instinct for beauty in dress and deportment.

But the mother, looking at how well her daughter

wore the cheap navy blue costume and the white frilled blouse, and the little round black hat with a fat, fluffy, glossy curl covering each ear, and the black silk stockings with blue clocks in them, and the little black shoes that had laces of three colours in them, got suddenly enraged with . . . She didn't know with what she got enraged. But for the moment she hated her daughter's beauty, and she remembered all the anguish of giving birth to her and nursing her and toiling for her, for no other purpose than to lose her now and let her go away, maybe to be ravished wantonly because of her beauty and her love of gaiety. A cloud of mad jealousy and hatred against this impersonal beauty that she saw in her daughter almost suffocated the mother, and she stretched out her hands in front of her unconsciously and then just as suddenly her anger vanished like a puff of smoke, and she burst into wild tears, wailing: "My children, oh, my children, far over the sea you will be carried from me, your mother." And she began to rock herself and she threw her apron over her head.

Immediately the cabin was full of the sound of bitter wailing. A dismal cry rose from the women gathered in the kitchen. "Far over the sea they will be carried," began woman after woman, and they all rocked themselves and hid their heads in their

aprons. Michael's mongrel dog began to howl on the hearth. Little Thomas sat down on the hearth beside the dog and, putting his arms around him, he began to cry, although he didn't know exactly why he was crying, but he felt melancholy on account of the dog howling and so many people being about.

In the bedroom the son and daughter, on their knees, clung to their mother, who held their heads between her hands and rained kisses on both heads ravenously. After the first wave of tears she had stopped weeping. The tears still ran down her cheeks, but her eyes gleamed and they were dry. There was a fierce look in them as she searched all over the heads of her two children with them, with her brows contracted, searching with a fierce terror-stricken expression, as if by the intensity of her stare she hoped to keep a living photograph of them before her mind. With her quivering lips she made a queer sound like "im-m-m-m" and she kept kissing. Her right hand clutched at Mary's left shoulder and with her left she fondled the back of Michael's neck. The two children were sobbing freely. They must have stayed that way a quarter of an hour.

Then the father came into the room, dressed in his best clothes. He wore a new frieze waistcoat, with a grey and black front and a white back. He held his soft black felt hat in one hand and in the

other hand he had a bottle of holy water. He coughed and said in a weak gentle voice that was strange to him, as he touched his son: "Come now, it is time."

Mary and Michael got to their feet. The father sprinkled them with holy water and they crossed themselves. Then, without looking at their mother, who lay in the chair with her hands clasped on her lap, looking at the ground in a silent tearless stupor, they left the room. Each hurriedly kissed little Thomas, who was not going to Kilmurrage, and then, hand in hand, they left the house. As Michael was going out the door he picked a piece of loose white-wash from the wall and put it in his pocket. The people filed out after them, down the yard and on to the road, like a funeral procession. The mother was left in the house with little Thomas and two old peasant women from the village. Nobody spoke in the cabin for a long time.

Then the mother rose and came into the kitchen. She looked at the two women, at her little son and at the hearth, as if she were looking for something she had lost. Then she threw her hands into the air and ran out into the yard.

"Come back," she screamed; "come back to me."

She looked wildly down the road with dilated nostrils, her bosom heaving. But there was nobody

n sight. Nobody replied. There was a crooked tretch of limestone road, surrounded by grey crags hat were scorched by the sun. The road ended in a ıill and then dropped out of sight. The hot June lay was silent. Listening foolishly for an answering :ry, the mother imagined she could hear the crags simmering under the hot rays of the sun. It was something in her head that was singing.

The two old women led her back into the kitchen. "There is nothing that time will not cure," said one. "Yes. Time and patience," said the other.

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